96

Letting-Down-the-Bars Series. No. 4

THROUGH THE DESERT

BY

MRS. A. K. DUNNING

VOLUMES OF THE SERIES

1. LETTING DOWN THE BARS
2. SCATTERED
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THROUGH THE DESERT.

CHAPTER I.

A FASHIONABLE CHRISTIAN.

"YE cannot serve God and Mammon." This was the saying of one who might be supposed to know, and to teach, the very truth; yet when these words were repeated to young Mrs. Ashton by her sister, Patience Hosmer, she exclaimed, "What nonsense!" emphasized the exclamation by a very decided toss of the head, and considered the matter settled. For Mrs. Ashton had tried to do this thing, and had, according to her own account, succeeded admirably.

"You see, my dear," she said, with a smile that was calculated to charm away

the power of criticism in any one who saw it, "I have learned to take things comfortably and to adapt myself to circumstances. Since I have seen more of the world I have enlarged my views, and I find that the strict, puritanical rules in which I was brought up are all a humbug."

Charity, a third sister, who had come into the room just in time to hear this statement, appeared to be both shocked and astonished.

"I should think that respect for your father's memory would keep you from saying that, Ruth, even if you think it," she said; "and, as a Christian woman, I do not see how you can think it."

"I was prepared to shock Patience," said the young wife, with a merry laugh, "but I did not think that you would be against me. I thought you yourself were in favor of letting down the bars, Charity."

"Perhaps I am, in practice," said Charity. "I have never set out in earnest to lead the

Christian life, and I confess that the service of Mammon has engrossed much of my time and thoughts since I came to live with you; but I do not justify myself. I know that father's preaching was all right, and that if we had chosen to abide by it we should have been much better than we are."

"I do not mean any disrespect to our dear father," said Ruth, "but I cannot hold to all the old worn-out theories with which theologians have contrived to fetter mankind for so many years. As Mr. Ashton says, if religion is good for anything at all, it ought to make people happier; and how can any one be happy who is always fearing to transgress some rule in partaking of the good things of life? I have tried both ways, and I ought to know. I found it impossible to keep within the bars, so I threw them down; but my conscience was still fettered, and so long as it kept accusing me of wrong-doing how could I be contented?"

"Do you mean to say that you are now quite satisfied with yourself?" said Patience.

"It sounds conceited to say so," replied Ruth, with a very charming blush, "but I do think I do as well as could be expected. I used to be always bringing myself to the bar of judgment for acting out my own nature; or I used to compel myself to do disagreeable duties or to act contrary to my own tastes. What was the consequence? I was cross or capricious or discontented most of the time. Now I just please myself, and I feel quite amiable. I go to church every Sunday morning when the weather is fine; I make a point of that, and I really enjoy it. In the afternoon I drive out with Mr. Ashton, or we dine out or have company to dinner. In the evening, if no one happens to be in, we sing hymns, or I take up some interesting book, or I just rest. And I claim that I am a better Christian than I used to be."

"You might be that without being one

of the shining lights in the church," said Charity, dryly. "There certainly was room for improvement."

"You say that to provoke me," said Ruth, "but you will not succeed. I am not so easily disturbed as I used to be. Mr. Ashton says he thinks better of all Christians since he has known me, because I am so reasonable about it. How much better it is to have him feel in that way than to have him disgusted and set in the opposition! I do not despair of quite winning him over to my own views. He allows me to give as much as I choose to charitable objects, and only laughs at me a little about it."

"Then we are to infer that you give a great deal?" said Patience.

"Well, yes," said Ruth. "I never was stingy about money, even when I had very little, and it is not likely that I am going to begin now, when my allowance is so large that I could give away half of it and never miss it."

She settled herself back in the cushioned chair, folded her hands and gave a complacent smile, which testified even more than her words that she was on the whole quite satisfied with herself and her surroundings.

Well, if worldly prosperity has power to satisfy the soul, Mrs. Ashton had reason to be content. She had been nearly a year a wife, and was still the petted idol of the man who had married her. None of the cares or perplexities of married life had as yet rubbed away the romantic devotion of the honeymoon. Her time had been spent in traveling and in sightseeing, both of which pursuits were well adapted to her tastes. The most charming dresses which Paris could supply had been freely ordered for her use. Her beautiful figure had attracted admiration when, as Ruth Hosmer, she had been obliged to fit it herself from very scanty and homely materials. Living in a retired farmhouse with her father, a country minister, she had spent many a weary

hour in striving to set off that figure to advantage. As a governess in the family of Mrs. Hovey she had found herself with more money, but her frets and worries had subdued her spirits and soured her temper. Now, as the wife of a rich man, she was, for the first time, properly and becomingly dressed, and the effect was such as to charm all beholders. She was not so *very* young: to tell the truth, she was thirty-one; but then she was so quick and impulsive in all her movements, so slender, so graceful and with such a delicate rose-tint in her dimpled cheeks, that no one would have supposed her to be more than twenty.

Mr. Ashton said that time had stolen no charm from his fair young wife, but that every year had brought to her some gift of grace. And he must have known, for she had been a mere girl when he first met her, and he had then been so impressed by her that he had never from that time cared for any other woman. He had then and

there decided that she should become his wife; and, although at first not successful, he had carried his point. From the altar he had taken her abroad, and it had been a real pleasure to him to notice how the world—namely, the society in which he moved—applauded and approved of his choice. He was very proud of the sensation which Mrs. Ashton was ever sure to create by both her beauty and her voice, for her singing was really a treat for any lover of music. Her fresh, enthusiastic nature made her a delightful traveling-companion, and he enjoyed anew with her sights which had lost the charm of novelty for him. He was rather imperious by nature, but this had not as yet caused any disturbance to his dreams of bliss. Ruth was not at all inclined to be strong-minded or to be what is called set in her ways. She was capricious and willful enough when she was out of temper or when any unpleasant hitch came into her life,

but when she was pleased she was rather pliable than otherwise.

Amos Hosmer, Ruth's brother, and the most cynical, sarcastic member of the family, used to say that he could make Ruth change her opinions at any moment by a little well-timed flattery, and Charity, whose tongue was rather sharp, had replied that Ruth trimmed her opinions as she did her bonnets—to suit the occasion on which they were to be worn. This was perhaps rather severe, but her present position would seem to justify it.

Mr. Ashton flattered and petted her, and he at once began to rule her opinions as well as to guide her actions, though he did not hesitate to fling the gage of defiance at all the truths which she had been taught to hold most sacred. She had not loved Mr. Ashton so very much when she married him. She had been awed by his superior age and by his knowledge and his rather haughty demeanor. In her secret

heart she would have preferred one Edward Stanton, a farmer's son who had been her favorite school-companion. He was so young and bright, and she felt so sure of his sympathy in all her pursuits. But that had all gone by. Her nature was more quick and responsive than it was deep. Her husband's age and knowledge now gave her a certain added importance, and even the haughty demeanor was a sort of support to her own dignity.

"This Bible is the word of God, my children; let it be a light and a guide to you all through life." So had her honored father taught with the open Bible before him and the eager, happy group of children around him, and when the next words came with the dignity of a command—"Let us pray"—she had bowed down with the rest, swayed by an influence which she could not resist.

"What have you there, Ruth?" said Mr. Ashton as he surprised her reading this

same book. "The Bible? Truly, you must wish to puzzle your little head with metaphysics. Confess, now, that you do not understand one half that you read."

"Of course I do not," was the laughing reply. "The very wisest men do not pretend to understand all that is in the Bible, and I know that I am not very wise."

"Then why do you make such a point of reading it?" said Mr. Ashton. "It cannot give you much pleasure to read that which you do not understand."

"Why, it is very wrong not to read God's word, for one thing," said Ruth. "My father taught us that we ought to read at least a few verses every day."

"And you have never given it up. So it is merely a question of habit?"

"No, no! not that exactly," said Ruth. "It is God's word, and I, as a child of God, am bound not only to read it, but to follow its teachings."

Mr Ashton laughed aloud. "Oh, that is

it?" he said. "You read it because it is God's word. And if I can prove to you that these writings are just a device contrived by a few priests to fetter mankind, will you still continue to read it?"

"You cannot prove it," said Ruth. "My father taught me otherwise; he would not have deceived me."

"No, he would not have intentionally deceived you," said Mr. Ashton, "and I am prepared to believe that he was a very estimable man. But the world is moving on; new discoveries are being made every day; the superstitions of a past age are dying. I doubt whether your honored father himself, had his life been spared, would have continued to teach and to preach now the same old rules and doctrines which a few years ago he so thoroughly believed in."

"Oh yes, he would," said Ruth; "I am very sure of that. And I am very sure that the Bible is God's own word, whether I understand it or not."

"And I maintain that it is not," said Mr. Ashton. "Shall I prove it?"

"No, no!" cried Ruth, pressing her hands against her ears; "I will not listen to you. You shall not unsettle my faith."

The very fear expressed in these words was a tacit compliment as well as a betrayal of conscious weakness. Then her action was so childish, and she looked so very pretty, that Mr. Ashton was charmed rather than displeased. He took the soft white hands in his, and his admiration was clearly expressed in his face and by his voice as he said, "You need not guard those ears from me, my darling. The child shall keep its toy so long as it takes any pleasure in playing with it. She shall believe any absurdity she chooses if only it makes her happy."

And Ruth, conscious of the love and admiration, hardly heeded the aspersion which he cast upon her faith, and certainly did not resent it. So it came about that she ex-

pressed Mr. Ashton's opinions in her conversation with others almost as if she herself embraced them, and, while flattering herself that she resisted him, was really almost entirely guided by him.

Patience and Charity were often both shocked and astonished to hear her avow sentiments which seemed to them absolutely wicked. They tried to touch her conscience, but Ruth had lost the sensitiveness which had made her mourn over her own defects. Secure in her worldly prosperity and in her husband's love, she was no longer conscious of defects. She was quite in earnest when she assured her sisters that she was a better Christian than she used to be. Once she had been fretful; now she was not. Once she had been selfish; now no sacrifices were demanded of her. Once she had been unamiable; now she was seldom out of temper. She had ceased to measure her life by the life of Christ, and in comparing herself with

others she found that she was really a very good sort of a woman. She was always ready to give of her abundance to those who were in need. Now, there was that rich Mrs. Stephens, who sat in the pew next to hers in church, who would never give away a dollar on any plea whatever. And then she was not given to gossip, while some professing Christians were always saying hateful things to make every one uncomfortable. She had given up the strict rules and doctrines, but she endeavored to do about as well as she could. Of course she made some mistakes, but she had now learned to excuse herself for errors which she deemed trifling. She knew she wasted her time and her life in frivolous pursuits, but it was her husband's wish that she should do so, and she easily persuaded herself that it was her first duty to please her husband. If, in so doing, she best pleased herself, it was all the better. Then she did at times find herself saying things

which were not true, when she was swayed by excited feeling or a desire to charm people, but she was never malicious; and who could always be on guard or so weigh every word and look that it should give exactly the right impression? Thus she stifled the accusations of conscience and was at rest.

Her whole life seemed rose-tinted. She was queen in her beautiful home, yet free from its cares, for Charity, her quick-witted, energetic younger sister, played the part of housekeeper to perfection, taking pride in the good management which secured her independence. On no consideration save the knowledge that her services were really needed would Charity have accepted a place in the household of her rich brother-in-law and a suitable allowance for her support.

Ruth was queen in the heart of her husband; she was queen in the society in which she moved; and her golden chariot-wheels

rolled on without any jolt which could disturb her or suggest that the time could ever come when she should be dethroned. If she had paused for serious thought, she might have known that beauty fades, that loves dies, that society is fickle, that even wealth can disappear. But Ruth had always hated serious thought, and it was not likely that she would endure it when it was not pressed upon her.

The next-door neighbor lost a beautiful young daughter through a sudden attack of illness. Ruth sent in an offering of flowers on the day of the funeral, and turned away with a shiver. Mr. Ashton forbade the subject to be mentioned in her presence, and took her to the opera to divert her mind. What had sickness and death to do with Mrs. Ashton, pray?

Mrs. Hovey's husband had grown so cold and careless of her comfort that she felt herself to be neglected and was very unhappy. She confessed the fact to Ruth,

her former governess, and looked to her for sympathy.

But Ruth turned from her and avoided her: "She has herself to blame for it. I shall never forget what I endured in that woman's family. I only wonder that Mr. Hovey could ever have cared for her at all."

This was Mrs. Ashton's verdict, and doubtless it was the true one; but the manner in which it was pronounced had in it something of hardness, considering that the woman was really suffering and had once been her friend.

Mr. Bates—a man who had often advised Mr. Ashton in money-matters, and who had had millions at his command—had been ruined through imprudent speculation. But Ruth only tossed her pretty head when she heard of it. "The man is a fool!" she said. "Why could he not have been content when he had enough, and have retired from business? But he

must needs risk all, and lose all. I do not pity him in the least."

Charity had never been very sympathetic in her nature, but her womanly compassion induced her to reply: "He is all the more to be pitied if he knows that his own rashness has ruined his fortunes."

"I do not agree with you," said Ruth, sharply; "he ought to have known better. I should not at all wonder if he would try to induce Mr. Ashton to help him start again, but I shall not advise it. People who show such lack of judgment are not to be trusted. He is sure to go down again; you mark my words."

"He will stay down if every one carries out the spirit of your words," said Charity; but she did not speak her mind to her sister so freely as once she would have done. The new dignity and frequent appeals to Mr. Ashton, the decided manner and emphatic gestures, were not without their effect even upon Charity. Mrs. Ashton,

enthroned as queen, was not quite the same as the petted, spoiled girl whose faults were to be reproved and, if possible, corrected.

"I wish you would try to spend more of your time with Ruth," said Charity to Patience. "She is as kind to me as she can be, and her manners are greatly improved; I never expected to be so proud of her as I am now; but I fear that she is in need of guidance. You once had a great influence over her, Patience; why do you never try to exert it?"

Patience turned her grave brown eyes upon her sister and sighed. "Charity," she said, "you know as well as I do that it would be useless. Ruth has chosen Mr. Ashton as her guide, and is but an echo of his thoughts."

"And so you have given her up?" said Charity, with some excitement—"our own sister, whom father so loved and cared for and watched over and prayed for! She

is to be given up to grow more and more selfish, to deceive herself, to lose even the memory, perhaps, of the truths that might save her. Patience, I never would have believed it of you."

Patience was somewhat surprised at the fervor of this appeal. "If you feel this so keenly," she said, "why do you not speak to Ruth yourself, Charity?"

"Because I am a coward," said Charity, frankly; "I confess that I am afraid of Mr. Ashton. I have never yet had the least cause to complain of his manner to myself; he is always the gentleman, and his voice is gentle and his speech is smooth; but the thought which I had when I first knew him has never left me. I know that the cat has sharp claws though her paws seem very soft and their touch is as velvet. The way in which he rules Ruth would be intolerable to me; yet she hardly seems conscious of it. If I were to set her in opposition to him, I should

tremble for the consequences both to her and to myself."

"Yet you would have me do it?"

"You need not ask the question in that reproachful way, Patience," exclaimed Charity; "you know that you are very different. I have not the same authority to speak to others about religion that you have; I am so often in the wrong myself. If I should meddle with Ruth, I should only make every one angry and do more harm than good."

"I have the same feeling," said Patience. "I used to influence Ruth, I know; even when she pretended not to care for what I said, she did care, and often modified her actions very much because I did not approve of them; but now she laughs and defies me and justifies herself, so I am silent. I have no wish to estrange myself from my sister, and that is all the effect that any interference from me could have. She repeats to Mr. Ashton every-

thing that is said to her, and he is quite capable of banishing me from the house if he were to grow jealous of my influence."

"'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone,'" said Charity. "It seems to me like that, and I cannot bear to think of it." She spoke quickly, and gave a little nervous shiver.

"No, not that," said Patience; "I do not believe that can apply to Ruth."

"Why not?" said Charity. "She has gone so far out of the way that I do not see how she can ever find the way back. She may be a child of God, but she certainly is a transgressor, and a very bold one."

"The way of transgressors is hard," was the reply. "I have sometimes thought that Ruth might find her way back 'through the desert,' since pleasant paths are so dangerous."

"I do not understand you," said Charity. "Ruth has had troubles to bear, if you

mean that, and they only served to make her hateful. I like her better as she is now, for she is kind and agreeable. She has never been right, in my opinion."

"Charity," said Patience, "I cannot understand you. If you are so anxious about Ruth, why are you so careless about yourself?"

The girl's face flushed, but she answered lightly: "Oh, I shall do well enough. Can you not see the difference between Ruth and me? She thinks she is sure of heaven, and says so; I know that if I ever get there I must right about face and travel the other way."

"Then why not do it?" said Patience, persuasively. "The only time you can be sure of is the present: why not do it now?"

"'Because I have not the will to,' as old Abel Grimes used to say. The world offers many temptations, and I never had my fling, you know, till I came to live with Ruth."

"Oh, Charity, stop!" cried Patience. "I cannot bear to hear you speak like that of such a serious matter."

"Do not be discouraged; I have not the least intention of holding to my present course for ever," began Charity, in the same flippant way. But, seeing tears in her sister's eyes, her manner changed. "Do not cry for me, Patience," she said; "I am not worth it. I despise myself, for 'I know the right, and still the wrong pursue.' When I boarded with Dr. Ellis, and earned my own living, and had his prayers and example to help me, I did try to live as father would have wished me to live, but now all is changed. I always did like pretty dresses and a gay life, and when these things are thrust upon me I forget that they cannot last, and that they would not fully satisfy me even if they could. So I yield for a time, as to a pleasant dream, but this is not to be my real life: I am fully resolved as to that."

"And how can you be sure that you will ever carry out that resolve?" said Patience, earnestly. "'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone,' is a fearful sentence, but it might well apply to those who refuse to listen to the voice of God and resist the pleading of his Spirit. If he has given to you the knowledge and the purpose of which you speak, are you not in great danger when you deliberately choose to act in opposition to them even for a time? Suppose the knowledge and the purpose should leave you never to return: what then would your fate be?"

Charity grew very pale even to her lips. "I never thought of that," she said.

"Do think of it, then," said Patience, "and lose no time in acting upon it."

She hoped to have a quick and favorable response to this appeal, but Charity suddenly sprang to her feet and said, "Truly, this is a case of the biter bitten! I came here to beg a sermon for Ruth, and, in-

stead, I have received one for myself." She gave her skirts a little fling, and had proceeded as far as the door, when she turned and added in a softer tone, "Pray for us, Patience! Pray for Ruth, and for me too. We both need your prayers badly enough."

Patience would have detained her, but she ran quickly out into the street, and was soon beyond recall.

CHAPTER II.

OVERCOME BY TEMPTATION, YET FINDS A SHELTER AND HELP.

LIFE presents strange contrasts, and it often happens that we find the most striking instances of this among members of the same family.

On a certain day, when the charming Mrs. Ashton was preparing to throw open her house for her first reception, a tall, thin young man in very shabby attire stepped out of the cars at a small way-station on the coast of Maine and walked down the road without seeming to care where he was or whither he went. He did not look like a good young man, and the odor of strong drink and stale tobacco hung about him even amid the pure sea-breezes in the keen country air. His hair

and beard were neglected, and his clothing was not only shabby, but much too thin for the season of the year. Yet if any one could have gotten a clear view of the face which the large slouched hat concealed, the verdict would have been that it was not a common face, and there was something in the young man's bearing that was strangely at variance with his clothing. He shivered as he left the cars, and looked about him with a bewildered air. The fumes of the strong drink were in his breath, and also in his brain.

From the station there were two roads. At the entrance to one there was a sign-board with a hand pointing toward the town. The other sign had printed upon it in large letters "By the Sea."

The latter seemed to draw the stranger's attention. "'By the sea'!" he muttered. "I used to like the sea. I think I will go that way." He moved off with a somewhat uncertain tread.

The station-master called after him: "Young man, you have mistaken the road."

"Mind your own business!" was the curt, uncivil reply, and he staggered on, muttering to himself. "That is what they all say: 'You have mistaken the road. What does it matter? I have cut loose from them all. I will choose my own road; I will please myself."

There was no one at hand to persuade him to seek warmth and shelter, and his incoherent mutterings seemed to freeze in the frosty air. The man at the station busied himself about his own affairs and never gave him another thought; so he wandered on till he had left all traces of the town far behind him, and the cold wind seemed to grow more keen with every breath, and the angry roar of the sea broke upon his ear. Then he came to his senses, to find himself alone upon a country road with not a single habitation in

sight. On one side, not far away, was the sea, with its white-capped waves, spreading as far as the eye could reach; on the other, barren fields and leafless trees, looking very pure and beautiful under a light veil of snow. To a lover of nature in comfortable circumstances the view would have been glorious in beauty, but to a chilled, tired, hungry man it was not reassuring.

He paused and looked about him. He was suddenly sobered, and took in the whole situation at a glance. Then there broke from his lips a cry of despair, although it was a shout for help. There was no response except the heavy, sullen beating of the waves. He made no second attempt. There was no one to hear. He could hardly hear himself.

A sort of apathy took possession of him. "The play ends here," he said, "out in the cold. And you well deserve your fate, Paul Hosmer. You have thrown away

your life; you have broken your word; you have acted like a fool and a madman to the last."

It was a sort of relief to speak his thoughts aloud, although only the winds and the waves could hear him; in a dim, dreary way it gave him a sense of companionship. It was quite in keeping with the character of the man to strive to cheat himself thus; it was also in keeping with his character to break off with a bitter, scornful laugh which had in it more of misery than of mirth.

He had come to himself. His brain was clear; the fogs which had beclouded it for a time had rolled away, and well he remembered it all. As in a lightning's flash his past stood before him—his innocent boyhood in a Christian home; his first attempts to earn his living; his high ambition; his success; his first yielding to an evil habit; his after-slavery to that same habit; his sudden downfall; his

sense of shame when his sister Patience had looked upon him in his degradation; his firm resolve to redeem himself; his vain struggles; his encounter with the bad men who had persuaded him to drink with them, and then had cheated him and robbed him. He knew no more. It must have been these men, he thought, who had enticed him to this desolate place and had left him here to perish. If that had been their game, they had succeeded well.

He felt that he could not hold out much longer. He did not know how long it was since he had tasted victuals, but he knew that he was weak from want of food; he also knew that every breath of that keen air seemed to cut him to the heart. And then he was so tired—so very tired! He could not resist the temptation to try to rest, although he knew the danger of yielding to such a desire. He threw himself down upon the bank by the roadside.

After all, what did it matter? Why

should he try to live? The wind did not now cut him quite so keenly. He was getting warmer. It was pleasant to cease to struggle. He was beginning to have sweet dreams. The white, fleecy clouds did not seem so cold as they floated in misty forms over the blue heaven. Heaven! It was there that little Faith had gone—his sister whom God had taken. There too was his brave, godly father, who had so often prayed for him and taught him how to pray for himself.

The clouds began to assume shapes and fanciful likenesses. From one of them he seemed to see the sweet, pleading face of his angel-sister looking down at him; in another, his father's face and form, but the face expressed only sorrow and reproach. Oh how he longed to go to them, to be with them!

"Father! Little Faith!" His voice died in a hoarse whisper.

"No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom

of heaven." Oh, stinging memory! Why come to mock him with the very words which his father had read to him from the great family Bible in the home of his childhood? Now, when it was too late, why torment him thus?

But was it too late? The life of opportunity was not quite gone. It was worth one more struggle. He tried to rise; he tried to rouse himself. In vain; his benumbed limbs refused to respond to his will. He sank back upon the frozen ground and lost consciousness.

A moment later, and there was a sound of wheels and voices upon the lonely road.

"It has been a good day's work, my dear," said one voice; "I made a good trade at the store. Butter and eggs have gone up, and sugar and tea are cheaper than they were the last time."

The speaker was a man who was no longer young. His rough great-coat certainly had no style about it, but it had

the merit of being a very sufficient protection for his somewhat portly person. The fur collar, which was so drawn up as to half cover the rosy double chin, was warm if not ornamental, and the fur cap was comfortable if not becoming.

The middle-aged woman who sat beside him was so well encased in the folds of a thick shawl that she could hardly turn her head, but she answered cheerfully: "It has been a good day's work for me too. I found Jim's wife all out of sorts; and no wonder: Jim has been off on a spree and the children have been sick, and they had hardly a bit to eat in the house."

"Now, that is what I call a shame," said the man. "How Jim can treat his good, hardworking wife so is a mystery to me. They must not be left to suffer."

"That is just what I was thinking," was the reply. "The Lord seems to have prospered us this year more than common. A load of wood might be taken from our

lot and hardly be missed, and a few potatoes from the cellar; and I could spare one of those hams as well as not."

"Is there anything else?" said the man.

"Nothing that I think of just now, unless it be a taste of butter and a few eggs. But I will have it on my mind."

A loud laugh broke in upon her speech. "I'll warrant!" said the husband. "Oh, Mary, what a woman you are! A man would need to be made of money to have you for a wife."

"Nonsense, John!" was the good-natured reply. "You have often said that it was the best day's work you ever did when you drove to the minister's with me, and I am sure you have never yet come to want through my management."

"True," said John, tenderly. "I bless the Lord for a good wife; and if she is a little more ready to open the pocket-book than some are, I cannot see that I am any the poorer for it. But what have

we here?" he added, in an altered voice. "A drunken tramp!" His eyes had fallen upon the prostrate form of Paul Hosmer, and unconsciously he tightened his grasp of the reins, so that his horses came to a sudden stop.

"A man!" exclaimed his wife, in a very different tone. "Lying out on the road on such a day as this! He will freeze to death. I fear he is frozen now."

Mr. John Weaver's only answer was to throw her the reins and to spring from the wagon with an alertness which his size and age would hardly seem to warrant. He then bent down and placed his hand upon Paul's heart. "Not dead, but pretty nigh it," he said, in a tone of relief, as he vigorously rubbed the chilled limbs of Paul Hosmer.

"He is coming to himself; he will live," cried the good wife, who had been earnestly watching the effect of these ministrations. "Oh, John! Wrap this robe

around him; get him into the wagon and drive home as quick as you can."

No sooner said than done; and it was not long before Paul Hosmer came to himself, for the second time that day, to find himself upon an old calico-covered lounge in a farmer's kitchen, with warm blankets around him and kind faces bending over him. "Where am I?" he said, dreamily. "I thought it was all over with me."

"Never you mind," said a woman's voice, in a gentle, soothing tone, as though addressing an infant. "Just drink this, and you will be all right."

Paul eagerly drank the cup of tea which was held to his lips. "It is a long time since any one spoke to me like that," he said. "It sounds like my mother."

"Hear that, now!" said the farmer's wife, all in a tremor of delight; "he is thinking of his mother. And how pretty he pronounces his words! Hus-

band, I do not believe he is a common tramp at all."

Revived still more by the warmth and the refreshing drink, Paul raised himself upon one elbow and looked about him. He was in a large kitchen with a huge open fire blazing out a perfect roar of warmth and comfort. The bare floor was bright with yellow paint and as clean as a floor well can be. The tins upon the open shelves shone as if they had never been used. Upon a large braided mat in front of the hearth the well-fed cat was lazily licking its paws. In one corner a high, old-fashioned eight-day clock noisily and persistently proclaimed the flight of time. In the opposite corner there was a small square table, and upon it a well-worn family Bible.

On awakening from his deathlike sleep, the man who had sinned and suffered forgot for one brief moment the intervening years and felt as if he were again a child.

He fancied that he was in the dear old home; he fancied that his father sat there in the corner with his hand upon the book; he fancied that it was the echo of his mother's steps to which he listened; and when strange faces alone responded to his searching glance, he began to cry as a child might have done. The weakness from his chill and long fast, the surprise of sudden warmth and shelter after being out in the cold, combined with his homesick yearning for that which could never come again, made a baby of him.

"Crying, be you?" said a rough voice. "Well, I don't know as you have much call to cry. It is not often that a man lies down to sleep by the roadside on such a day as this and ever gets up again. If we had not chanced to come along just when we did, it would have been all over with you. How could you act so like a fool?"

Paul discerned a trace of contempt in

this address, but he did not resent it. Never before had he been so conscious of ill-desert. He began to have a sense of sin, to feel the consequences of it. He was thoroughly humbled.

"Mr. Weaver!" The good wife's voice was stern and reproachful. "How can you be so unfeeling?—Never you mind him, young man. He worked hard to save you. Under God, you owe your life to him."

"It was not worth saving," exclaimed Paul, bitterly. "It ought to have come to an end, for it has never done any good to myself or to any one else."

"Well, that is frank, anyhow," said the honest farmer, "and I like you the better for speaking the truth."

"Supper is ready," said Mrs. Weaver, who had been exerting herself to effect that end. "And I think we shall all feel better when we have eaten."

"So I say," responded her husband.

"I am pretty sharp-set myself.—Sit by, young man, and have a bite with us. My wife knows how to get up a good meal, if I do say it that should not say it."

Paul glanced with longing at the good cheer provided, then down at his soiled, ragged clothing. "I am not worthy—" he began.

But his host interrupted him. "Oh, draw up your chair," he said, "and set to work. Never you mind as to being worthy. If we had our deserts, most of us would find but slim picking."

The hungry man gratefully complied, and then for a time very little was said, but the cold meat and the biscuits and cheese and doughnuts and cake disappeared with surprising rapidity, to say nothing of the mince-pie and the roast apples and cream, which were appreciated only when the more solid food had partly allayed the pangs of hunger.

As soon as the table was cleared the

farmer took up the old Bible and his wife seated herself with a look of earnest attention upon her placid face. No word was spoken, and none was needed; for since John Weaver had experienced religion, some twenty years before, the prayer and the Scripture-reading in this family had never been omitted.

Paul Hosmer sat by and listened. The face and the form of the honest farmer were very different from his father's, and the slow, labored reading was very different also; but there was the same spirit of earnest devotion and the same fervor in prayer. The passage of Scripture which was chosen was the beautiful story of the prodigal son, and when the resolve was uttered, "I will arise and go to my father," the young man who had wandered so far from his father's teaching felt so utterly homesick and forlorn that a groan broke from his lips. The farmer heard it, and, though he knew

nothing of the story of his guest's life, specially remembered him in his prayer; and the prayer was heard in heaven, and on swift wings an angel of mercy descended with the answer of acceptance and pardon.

There had been no thought in the mind of either Mr. or Mrs. Weaver as to the future of the poor tramp whom they had rescued; they had but yielded to their own kindly Christian impulse when they saw his danger and need of help. It had seemed quite a matter of course that they should take him to their own home, warm him, feed him and give him a night's shelter. These simple-hearted Christians were of one accord in their desire to show forth the spirit of Christ, and in all their daily life they never turned a deaf ear to any appeal from suffering humanity.

Well was it for Paul Hosmer that the Lord had guided them along the lonely road just at that time. Through them

had come to him a sense of his own ill-desert, a sudden rush of tender memories and a yearning to get back. And there was more to follow, for the next morning he was unable to lift his head from his pillow. Exposure, starvation and fatigue had done their work upon the delicate frame, and they had done it so well that it seemed doubtful if he would ever again raise his head from that pillow.

CHAPTER III.

PATIENCE HOSMER CHANGES HER HOME.

THE woman who hopes to escape the heavier cares and burdens of life by refusing to marry often finds that she has made a great mistake.

Miss Patience Hosmer had lived more than thirty years and still showed not the least inclination to marry, but it was no cross to her to find that her cares increased as the years went by. She was no beauty, although many women with less pretensions have flourished as such. She had always been seen in society with her more beautiful sisters, Mrs. Ashton and Esther, or with her high-spirited sister Charity, or with her brother Joseph's fascinating wife, once known to the fashionable world as Miss Ella Thornton, the belle and

the heiress. Thus she had not attracted so much attention as she otherwise might have done. Still, some had been discerning enough to discover the preciousness of this woman with a beautiful soul, and had truly loved her. But as, for reasons of her own, she had rejected these lovers, and as she never mentioned them even to the members of her own family, we too will pass them by. Her brothers jestingly said that other girls might marry, but that Patience was too rich a blessing for any single home, therefore it had been ordained for her that she should diffuse her goodness through many households.

And, though spoken in jest, it proved to be sober earnest; for this sister was claimed by them all in every time of special need, and she ever gave a ready response of willing service. When she had been but a child, this life of service had begun. Her father and mother had leaned, perhaps too heavily, upon the

child who never failed them, and the brothers and sisters soon found that they might safely turn to her in all their scrapes or worries. After her father's death her health had failed, although the will and the love were tireless. Then she had gone out to find rest and change in the home of Mrs. Bayard, a rich widow who needed a companion. In this house she had proved invaluable, and, as health came back, she made herself the centre of so many charities and was of so much real service that her presence could hardly be dispensed with. To the child Esther, her baby-sister, whom Mrs. Bayard had adopted, she was a second mother, and never had any mother been more unselfish or devoted. Yet, strange to say, it was here alone that she met with ingratitude.

Esther, who presented to every one else a smiling face, too often had only pouts and frowns for the sister who so

loved her, and whom she loved as she did no one else in the world. Petting and indulgence had spoiled Esther and made her impatient of rebuke. Patience could not see her do wrong without warning her, and thus too often there were frictions and misunderstandings and heartburnings between them.

The girlish beauty, who was naturally thoughtless, laughed off these things and forgot them, but the older and more thoughtful woman felt that a shadow was cast over her daily life which she could not so easily dispel. There may have been other causes for the patient sadness which began to steal over her. It may have been that she mourned for Paul, her lost brother, but the fact was evident to all that this child of God, though surely on her way to her heavenly home, was passing through the desert, and knew what it was to be weary and to be thirsty and to be longing for rest.

One morning, after Esther had been unusually provoking, Patience was surprised by a visit from her brother Joseph. He came into the sunny room with a hurried tread and an anxious face. Patience gave him a loving greeting, and he still held her hand in his as he stood in front of the fire warming himself and looking about him. "How snug and comfortable you are here, Patience!" he said. "It rests a tired man just to see you."

Patience laughed. "I suppose you represent the tired man?" she said. "If you mean what you say, why do you come so seldom?"

"I rarely go anywhere," was the reply. "I have so much to attend to; I cannot leave my business."

"Yet you are so rich!" said his sister, in a tone of regret. "Of what use is money if one cannot take time to enjoy it?"

"True; of what use is it?" said the man of business. "I sometimes ask myself the same question. When I was poor, I worked hard, but I had a light heart; and when a holiday came in my way, I entered into the spirit of the occasion with the eagerness of a boy. Now, though I am my own master, the cares and the responsibilities of wealth press so heavily that I cannot shake them off. I can go where I choose, but my mind cannot rest; I can surround myself with luxuries, but I hardly seem to heed them. I sometimes am tempted to think that father was right when he sang with so much spirit,

"Earth is a desert drear;
Heaven is our home."

Patience gave the hand from which all traces of toil had vanished a loving pressure. "Oh, Joseph," she said, "if you really feel that—"

He stooped down and kissed her. "I

know what you would say," he replied; "but do not say it. My money disappoints my hopes in some ways, but I am glad that I have it, and I am always trying to get more. There is a sort of excitement in the winning and the management of it which I like."

"And you would give up your hopes of heaven just for that?"

He turned his face from her. "It is not so bad as that with me, I hope," he said. "I will have my money now and heaven by and by. As a living man I have my ambition, and I long for a nearer comfort than a hope of heaven."

Patience sighed, but she did not urge her plea. She only said, "And I am sure you have it. Think of your elegant home, your beautiful wife, your noble boy. Oh, Joseph, God has given you everything that men prize; and he would give you the best gift of all if you would take it."

She was surprised to see the effect of her words. At the mention of his home every trace of tenderness vanished from his face and the lines about his mouth grew hard and stern. "Do not call my house a home," he said. "It is very elegant and all that, but, as to home-quiet, home-comfort— Bah! There is nothing of either. I have a fashionable wife; she does not care for such things."

"Ella has never been used to housekeeping," said Patience, gently. "And she is so fond of society, so beautiful, so much admired by all, that you can hardly expect her to be like an older, graver woman."

"I know it," said Joseph. "I love my wife, and I do not wish to find fault with her; but I will say to you what I would say to no one else: I am disappointed in my married life even more than I am in my money."

"You ought not to say it to me," said

Patience; "you should not permit yourself to think it."

"I must say it, and you must know it," said Joseph. "How else can I urge the request which I came here to make? How else can I expect you to grant it? Patience, I wish you to come and live with me for a time. I know I cannot make it as pleasant for you as it is here, but I will do my best to make you happy."

"To live with you?" exclaimed Patience. "I cannot do that. Mrs. Bayard and Essie cannot spare me; and, besides, Ella would not wish it."

"Mrs. Bayard and Essie have had their full share of you," retorted Joseph, "and Ella wishes it as much as I do. She needs some one to help to entertain me when I am at home; she has so many other more important matters on her mind that she really cannot attend to such a trifle herself. She cannot get up

to breakfast when she has been out late the night before, and of course she cannot dine with me when she is invited out to dinner; and she says it really troubles her to think that I am left so much alone. Not that she lets the trouble wear upon her much—she bears up under it wonderfully—but then it would be a relief to her conscience to know that I had a sister in the house to look after me a little."

The bitter, sarcastic manner in which he said all this went to his sister's heart. He saw the tears in her eyes, and once more his mood grew tender. "It does not matter so much about me," he said. "I dare say I have myself to blame, as Ella says; I have been absorbed in business, and perhaps I have been a dull companion. I confess that this eternal party-going does not suit me, and that when I am not suited I have not a very amiable way of showing it. In many

respects Ella and I are well matched, but in one we differ. It is about our boy." His voice grew husky as he went on: "God only knows how I love that boy. It is for him that I work. He shall have a happy life; he shall have an education of the first order; he shall have money."

Patience here interposed: "Are you sure it will be the best thing for him, my dear brother? Many young men have been spoiled through too much money."

"I do not mean to spoil my boy," was the quick reply, "but he shall never encounter any hardships that I can spare him. And that is the reason that I particularly wish you to come to us. I hope you will look after him a little."

Patience laughed. "I should think, if ever a child were well looked after, it was that child," she said.

"Oh yes!" said Joseph, impatiently. "He has a robe that is all embroidered, and he has the prettiest little fancy

arrangement to sleep in that ever a baby had, and he has no end of toys; but, for all that, I am not satisfied. The truth is the boy does not thrive as our mother's babies used to do. He does not laugh and crow and spring, and he is altogether too pale. I think he misses something. Perhaps it is his mother's love."

At this Patience uttered an exclamation. "Now you are wrong," she said. "Ella seems perfectly devoted to her baby; she can talk of nothing else."

"I know it," was the bitter reply. "She talks about him, has him dressed like a little doll and exhibits him to all her friends; but she never holds him or soothes him to sleep, as mother used to do with her babies. She says she never has been used to children and does not know how to take care of them. She likes to play with him when he is good, but when he cries it worries her. She says he makes her nervous, and she

banishes him to the nursery; and when I urge her to find out what is the matter with him, she only says the nurse can manage him much better than she can."

"She has a very good nurse," said Patience.

"But no nurse can be quite like a mother," said Joseph. "Then how can one be sure that nurses do just right by a baby? This one is well recommended, and she is very soft in her ways before us, and she seems fond of the child; but one night, when the little fellow was crying, I stole up to the nursery door and listened, and I am sure she was rough with him. I fancied she even shook him."

"Oh!" cried Patience. "Did you tell Ella? I am sure she would never permit that."

Again the smile that she so hated to see just curled his lips. "Ella never believes anything that she does not wish to believe," he said; "she hates to be

disturbed. She is quite sure that I was fanciful and nervous. She thinks it is too undignified for a gentleman to be spying upon his servants in such a way."

Patience was filled with sympathy for both the father and the child. She had a fund of motherly tenderness for all young, helpless creatures. In her old home, no matter how great the press of household cares, the baby had never appealed to her in vain. She remembered once seeing a fashionable nurse dragging a beautifully-dressed child by the arm through the Park in quite a rough way; the thought that her brother's child might be subjected to similar treatment was unendurable to her. "Joseph," she said, "I will go with you this very day."

And she did. Mrs. Bayard remonstrated and Esther cried, but it was all in vain. So it was that Patience Hosmer once more changed her home and her sphere of usefulness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOUBTER IS TRIED.

AMOS HOSMER would seem to have been more specially blessed in temporal things than any other member of his father's large family. He had intellectual tastes, and he had the means to gratify them. He had not the cares that great wealth brings, but he had no lack of money for the satisfaction of his wants. He had a wife who exactly suited him, and he had four healthy and loving children in whom his soul delighted. His two sons were full of vigor and fun and enthusiasm; his two girls were graceful and pretty and gentle like their mother. His was almost a perfect home. He, the unbelieving son of believing parents; he, the one who rejected the faith in which he

had been so carefully taught; he, the child of the covenant, who boldly denied its claims,—had prospered most in those things which are calculated to make a man happy. It would seem as if God's plan were to draw this soul to himself by the cords of love. Some can be dealt with in this way; their hearts open to the sunlight, and

> "Celestial fruits on earthly ground
> From faith and hope do grow."

But this rebel held out in his rebellion. He rejoiced in his prosperity, but it only hardened his heart still more against God. He did not say it in words, but in his thoughts he was ever saying, "My father was a man of prayer; he trusted in God; yet how hard was his life, how ill repaid he was for his work! I have trusted to my own brains and have striven to advance my own fortunes, and I have hardly a thing on earth left to wish for.

Who can help seeing that mine is the better way?"

But "God is not mocked." He saw that the proud man boasted himself thus, and he changed his dealings with him. He said unto him, "I love thee; I have chosen thee. Go through the desert, and learn to know thyself and me."

As a sudden storm follows a bright day the change came.

The household were sitting in their pleasant parlor enjoying the evening-hour in the usual way. The crimson curtains shut out the darkness and the cold wintry wind. The fire was doing its best, now leaping up and throwing out fierce little jets of flame, now dying down into a soft, steady, mellow blaze that sets one to dreaming peaceful and beautiful dreams. The light from the softly-shaded lamp fell upon the whole family group; upon the table, with its burden of choice books; upon the piano,

which stood open; upon the stand of blooming plants in one of the windows; upon the golden-throated canary, who stood upon his perch in doubtful mood, half inclined to sing in response to the bright light which every now and then streamed into his cage; half inclined to drop off to sleep in response to the instinct which warned him that the proper time for such a performance had come.

Uncle Mat lay back in the depths of one of the large arm-chairs with his eldest niece upon his knee. She was well named "Mary," for she was the image of her mother and had the same gentle, restful ways. She was a great favorite with her young uncle, and he was telling her one of his most wonderful stories just to watch the surprise and unbelief which could be so clearly read in her innocent face.

The happy father of the family reclined

upon the lounge to rest, while his two merry, laughing boys climbed over him with a persistent affection which rendered rest impossible. The wife and mother swayed backward and forward in her low rocking-chair with her baby in her arms. She had named her "Faith," after the sister of her husband who had died so young. This little Faith was not much like that other, for she was a strong, merry child with a laughing face and golden hair and a spirit that was never at rest. Even now, though she was being rocked to sleep, she was ever on the keen watch for possibilities of fun, now darting off to run to her young uncle, now making a rush for one of the boys, and now demoralizing the very mother herself and making her laugh in spite of all her efforts.

"Could there ever be a happier home than mine?" said Mr. Amos Hosmer, in the fullness of his content.

"No, nor a better wife, nor nicer children," said his young brother Matthew. "If any one doubts on any of these points, just refer him to me."

"It is the wife and the children who make the home," said the man of learning, with a glance at his wife; and there was an expression on his pale, stern face such as no one who met him outside that charmed circle would have thought it capable of wearing.

The wife gave him in return a look and a smile which warmed his very heart. This married couple were devoted lovers still.

"If I ever marry," said Matthew, "I hope my wife will be like Mary."

Just then little Faith dropped her head upon her mother's breast with a faint sigh and said, "I so tired!"

The mother bent down till her face rested on the soft hair. "Rest, darling," she said.

"That child wears herself out with her love of play," said the father. "I wonder whether she will ever learn to take things more quietly?"

"Dear little pet! I hope not," said Matthew. "She is the life of the house."

The lids drooped over the violet eyes.

"I never knew her to fall asleep so quickly," said Mrs. Hosmer; and the talk went on in more subdued tones.

Presently Faith started and began to mutter in her sleep.

"I will carry her up to bed," said Mrs. Hosmer.

But at the first movement the child awoke and sat up, crying, "I do not want to go to bed." Her eyes shone like stars and her cheeks were very red.

"I do not think the child is well," said Mrs. Hosmer, in a tone of anxiety.

"Nonsense! She is the picture of health," said Matthew. He held out his

arms to her, but the baby clung more closely to her mother.

"Her hands are burning, and I do not like her breathing," said the mother.

"Nor I," said Mr. Amos Hosmer, who had taken one of the little hands in his. "She has eaten something that does not agree with her, perhaps. Do not be anxious, Mary; it is probably nothing serious. But I do not believe in neglecting such things; I will go for the doctor at once." His own anxiety was but too evident as he hurried away.

"How fanciful you parents are!" said Matthew, who had succeeded in winning a smile from his little favorite. "Faith is all right; she only frets a little because she is tired and sleepy."

"She is going to be ill," said Mrs. Hosmer, in a tone of conviction.

The other children began to kiss and pet the little one, and in various ways tried to amuse her. For a time she re-

sponded to their caresses. Then she pushed them all away.

"No, no!" the mother cried; "do not make Faith laugh. It hurts her throat."

At that moment Mr. Hosmer and the doctor came into the room.

"I do not think it will prove much of a case," said Mr. Hosmer. "The child is remarkably strong and healthy."

Dr. Gibson was a man of few words. He had heard the child's cry when he entered the room, and with a quiet bow to Mrs. Hosmer proceeded to examine the little one more carefully. His first remark startled them all: "These other children ought not to be here."

Matthew hustled them out of the room at once. He was anxious to be of service, and feared he knew not what.

The boys scampered up the stairs, glad to get away from the serious faces which frightened them. But Mary clung to her uncle and said, with a little woman-

ly air, "Why did that cross doctor send me away? If my little sister is going to be sick, I would like to stay with her and take care of her."

How gentle and loving the child was! How like her mother!

Matthew caught her in his arms and kissed her. "You little dear!" he said. "You could not take care of her."

"I could," she said. "I know how to keep her still when even mamma cannot do it."

She was a mite of a thing, yet there was a world of womanly sense and womanly devotion in her manner which astonished her uncle. She seemed to have grown up and changed at the first touch of trouble. He did not half like it. "Go to your nurse, dear," he said as he put her down. "It is time for you to be in bed."

But she still held his hand and looked up into his face with her earnest eyes.

"Will you tell the doctor?" she said. "And if he says I may come back, will you send for me? Tell him that I often take care of Faith, and that I always help mamma in everything."

"Yes, yes!" said Matthew. "And you can help her now if you will. Do hear what a noise those boys are making. Tell them to be quiet."

She smiled as she listened. "I will soon stop that," she said. "They do not mean to be naughty, but boys are so rough!"

He was amused at her old-fashioned ways, and laughed as he saw her hurry up the stairs. Yet, as he turned away, he said to himself, "I do not half like to see that look in a child's eyes. I will tell sister Mary that she ought to make her play more. When children act like that, they are apt to die young."

He had almost forgotten his anxiety about Faith, but as he went back into

the parlor the first words which he heard were these: "I do not think that I can be mistaken." It was the doctor who spoke. "Your child is coming down with the scarlet fever, and the attack seems likely to be severe. There are several cases in the immediate neighborhood, and you will do well to take all possible precautions in regard to the other children."

Scarlet fever! That foe to children—that terror to parents!

Amos Hosmer's heart thrilled with fear at the sound. "It shall not be so!" he cried, with a vehemence which startled them all. "I will not have it so!"

Dr. Gibson looked at him in some surprise. "It is God's will that must rule in a matter like this," he said.

"God's will"! That idea brought with it no consolation to the infidel. What if his father's creed were right? What if there should be a God who marked the ways and the thoughts of a man? What if

this God were dealing with him now? He trembled at the idea, but his fear was mingled with fierce anger at the thought that there might be a wisdom which he could not deceive, a power which he could not limit. He began to pace the floor in his distress, and then, finding that he could not control himself, he went out of the room.

Upon the grieving mother the effect of the doctor's words was different. She checked her sobs, and even upon the tumult of her grief there fell a great calm. She had for a brief moment forgotten, but she knew that both she and the child of her love were in His hands who doeth all things well, and that no real harm could befall them. She needed all her faith, for dark days were before her; she was to tread the scorching sands of the desert, and her very soul was to be tried.

Dr. Gibson had made no mistake as to the nature of Faith's malady, and it made

such rapid, fatal progress that they hardly had time to say "The child is ill," ere the child had for ever left her place in the earthly home.

Then each of the merry boys was taken, and then Mary, the gentle, helpful eldest-born, passed away with her hand in her mother's loving clasp and a smile upon her lovely face which almost made her mother forget to mourn.

Thus in a few brief days the whole scene changed, and Amos Hosmer and his wife were childless, or rather they had four children in heaven. The mother's faith could follow them there, but the father, alas! had nothing to sustain him in an hour like this. His was the bitterness of desolation, the blackness of despair.

The husband and the wife were seated in the room which was so still now. The home-comforts were all there—the bright fire, the soft light, the blooming plants—

but the merry voices of the children were hushed; and how different it all seemed! The bird's cage, with its singing prisoner, had been removed to an upper room. It had been Mary's bird and it was well cared for, but its gay song could not be endured now.

Matthew no longer spent his evenings there. It was not that he did not grieve with the stricken parents, but he felt that he could not comfort them, and that even his presence might be deemed intrusive till the first shock of this bereavement was overpast.

Then it was that, arousing herself from a reverie that was almost a stupor, the wife turned her eyes upon her husband and noticed the change in him. In the sudden demand for her constant services in the sick-room she had hardly thought of either herself or him. She had known that he often shared her watch; she had felt that he at least could understand all

that she was enduring. More than once in some specially trying moment she had turned to him and clung to him while she shed tears which she could not repress, but all her attention had been fixed upon the children, all her time had been given to the care of them. Now she was suddenly aroused to a new fear. How thin and pale he had grown! How the expression of his face had changed! His slender form bent as if the burden which rested upon him pressed too heavily to be endured, and his hair had grown gray. These days had done the work of years upon him. Her heart swelled with tenderness as she noticed this evidence of his deep feeling. She reproached herself for her blindness and her selfishness. Her children had been dear to her, but who in all the world had been so dear as this husband of her own choice? He had suffered so much, yet she had made no effort to comfort him.

She went to him and sat down close beside him. "Amos," she said, "let us not give up all hope. We shall meet our dear children again; that we know, for we have the sure promise of God."

But she broke off abruptly in her speech, for as she uttered that name her husband recoiled from her with a violence that almost threw her upon the floor. "'God'!" he cried, bitterly. "I do not believe that there is a God. If there is, I *hate* him!"

In the agitation of the moment the whole truth had asserted itself. He had hardly known it himself before; by many phrases of doubtful meaning he had concealed it from others. Now he not only knew it, but had openly acknowledged it; and the feeling gained strength from its candid avowal.

His wife drew back with a sudden fear. She had never before seen that expression of rage and defiance upon his face,

that fierce gleam in his eyes. Her first thought was that grief had crazed his brain. He read her feelings rightly, but had so entirely lost all self-control that he could not restrain himself. "I am not mad," he said, "but I am tired of all this cant. Your religion is all a fable and a delusion. If God gave us these children, why did he take them away? Does he take pleasure in breaking up our home—in breaking our hearts? Then there is no goodness in him, and I hate him!"

What more he might have said will never be known, for his wife threw up her hands with a cry of pain. "Oh, stop!" she said. "Do not say those words again. They pierce my heart." Then she grew very pale and sank back in her chair and closed her eyes.

The sight brought him to himself. He went to her and took her cold hand in his. "Mary," he said, "my dear wife, open your eyes. I am sorry that I have

grieved you so. Forget what I said. I will believe anything you like."

But she shuddered at his touch. The strain upon her nerves had been great during all these weary days; the parting with her children had cost her dear. She had been sustained by her faith in God and by her love for her husband. The first could never be taken from her, but the last had utterly failed her. It had been all a mistake from the beginning. She loved him still; she pitied him; but she had been so deceived in him that she felt as if he had been more completely taken out of her world than had the children who were awaiting her in heaven.

From that hour she drooped. It was an effort for her to move; she did not seem to take any interest in anything. The doctor said that she had no disease: it was only nervous prostration. She must have perfect rest, cheerful surround-

ings and tonics as she could bear them. She drew a long breath and lay back upon her pillow with folded hands. She had grown very weak, but she felt no uneasiness, no pain.

Her husband watched over her with the utmost tenderness. She met all his efforts with grateful love, but he felt that she was passing away from him. In this extremity he wrote for Patience, and Patience came. Amos received her with open arms. He knew that if any one could bring an atmosphere of peace and cheerfulness to his desolated home it would be this sister. He remembered her powers of old.

Mary smiled with something of her former brightness when she saw Patience bending over her. "It was so kind in you to come!" she said. "I longed to see you once again."

"I hope we shall spend many happy hours together, dear," said Patience; but

even as she spoke she felt that it was not to be so.

Again the pale face into which she gazed brightened. "The doctor says I need rest and cheerful company," was the reply, "and I have both. My rest is perfect lying here, and my soul communes with God. I do not feel about my children as I did at first. This is an evil world; it disappoints one so!"

"But you have led a happy life," said Patience. "You must try to get well for the sake of your husband!"

A little nervous chill shook Mary's slender frame. "I ought to wish it, I suppose," she said, "but I cannot. I am homesick, I think. Jesus is there, my father is there, my children are there. Oh, Patience, I hope it is not wrong, but I do want to go home."

Patience was surprised. "But your husband, dear," she said. "Think how he loves you and how you love him.

You surely would not wish to leave him alone in his sorrow?"

At first there was no reply. Then, as if animated by a sudden hope, Mary raised herself upon one elbow and said, "Patience, you have known him all your life: did my husband ever love God—ever believe in him?"

"Why, no," said Patience; "I thought you knew. He would never believe anything till he could reason it all out, and he said he could not understand my father when he talked to us."

"Oh," said Mary, "then he meant what he said on that dreadful day. I cannot repeat his words even to you his sister. But I wish you would talk to him, Patience."

"Why do you not talk to him yourself, dear?" said Patience. "He loves you very fondly."

"It would do no good," was the sad reply. "He knows so much, and I know

so little. I never could reason about things very well, and now I am so weak! But I can pray for him, and I do. I cannot bear to think that we shall all be there but him."

Tears filled her eyes, and Patience thought she had better leave her for a time.

When she went down, Amos eagerly questioned her as to her opinion of the invalid.

Patience was too true to attempt to deceive him. "I think she has changed very much," she said. "It seems as if the springs of her life were broken. She does not seem to care to make an effort to get well."

Amos groaned aloud in the agony of his spirit. "I have killed her," he said, bitterly. "When I had kept my opinions to myself for so many years, why could I not have persevered until the end?"

"I do not understand you," said Pa-

tience, simply. "I did not understand Mary, either."

Then Amos told her, and he did not spare himself in the recital.

"And this knowledge came to her when she needed comfort so much!" said Patience. "Oh how cruel! What a shock it must have given her! I do not wonder that she sank under it."

"You women are so credulous!" said Amos, with a sneer.

"Good men and wise have died for the faith of Christ our Lord," said Patience, proudly. "But I do not mean to discuss this subject with you any more, Amos. You have been carefully taught, and, so far as that can help you, need nothing more."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Amos. "When no one talks to me about God, I am indifferent; but when his name comes between me and those I love, it makes me hate him."

Once such words as these would have frightened Patience into silence; it was different now. Since she had passed through the desert she had learned to endure hardness and was not so easily repressed. She looked into her brother's face with a firmness before which he quailed as she said, "I will not trouble you, but my silence changes nothing. That name is as a gulf of eternal separation between you and those who are dearest to you unless your own will changes it."

He did not answer her a word; he fancied that it was anger which so stirred his soul as he quietly left the room; but her words and the look which accompanied them were with him by day and by night.

Other thoughts were with him before which his stubborn will began to bend. Mary grew no better. She was calm, and did not appear to suffer. When she

spoke of her lost children, as she often did, there were no tears in her eyes and there was a sweet smile upon her face. There was a peace in her aspect upon which he did not dare to intrude even his own grief. She had never been a beauty, but now there was a kind of loveliness in her appearance that made him tremble. It was as if an angel lingered in his house whom an adverse breath might cause to take instant flight. He loved her more than ever; he loved her so much that he could not bear to think that there was one thought in her mind, one feeling in her heart, from which he was shut out. He no longer said to himself, "There is no God. It does no good to pray." He said, "It may be that there is a God, and that prayer may prevail with him. I will test the thing for myself."

So he began to pray, and this was the prayer which he offered: "O God, if indeed thou art, and if thou canst hear pray-

er, grant me but this one life, and I will acknowledge thee and bow down before thee and serve thee."

He, the sinner, dared to come before the almighty Judge with such terms as these; he, the rebel, dared to come before his rightful King bearing himself like this; he who in the pride of his heart had rejected God in his boyhood, even as he knelt with his parents at the family-altar, dared to approach God now with such an offering as this! How condescending! How wonderfully willing to yield his own opinions!

The haughty man was haughty still. He would fain lay the Deity under obligations to him and compel him to purchase the homage which was his by right. Was it any wonder that his prayer received no answer of mercy—that it did not even soften his own heart?

His burden became too heavy for him to bear. He longed to have his wife speak

to him once more on the subject which she had carefully avoided ever since that fatal day upon which his true nature had been revealed to her. But she did not know of his desire. He did not dare to introduce any agitating subject of conversation, and she did not dare to cause him to repeat words which were so wicked. Thus side by side, with heart answering to heart, the bar of separation had fallen between them, and all true soul-communion had ceased. But as she lay there with folded hands she was ever praying for him, and every now and then she turned her eyes upon him with an expression of love and longing that he could hardly bear.

One evening, as he caught this look, he inadvertently replied: "What is it, dear? Can I do anything for you?"

For answer Mary said, "Patience, will you leave me alone with my husband?" Her voice was strangely weak.

Patience at once quitted the room.

Then Mary drew from beneath her pillow a little worn Bible and held it toward him. "Take it," she said; "it is my parting gift."

He took it and looked at it with a bewildered air, as if he only half comprehended her meaning.

"My father gave it to me when I was a little girl," she said; "the children liked to have me read it to them. You will open it sometimes for my sake? I have marked some of the verses which I love best."

She was obliged to pause frequently for breath, gently as she spoke. But still he sat there mute and motionless.

"We have been so happy," she said, in the same pleading voice; "our home has been so happy. I shall want you in the new home; the children will want their father. You *will* come? You *must* come! Oh, *say* that you *will*."

Then he threw himself upon his knees and hid his face and sobbed aloud.

She placed upon his head the hand which had held the Bible, and a strange bright smile lighted up her face. Then she drew one fluttering breath and was gone.

When Amos Hosmer raised his head and attempted to speak, she could no longer hear him.

Then the reason upon which he had prided himself deserted him. A settled melancholy took possession of him. He refused to speak; he ceased to exert himself in any way. He concealed the little worn Bible in his bosom, and would not let any one see it. Yet he never opened it. In vain his brothers and sisters tried to rouse or to cheer him; he hardly seemed to heed their presence. At length they placed him in a retreat where he could be cared for, and left him there, deserted and lonely.

CHAPTER V.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

MRS. JOSEPH HOSMER did not attend the funeral of her sister-in-law; neither had she been present at the funerals of the children. Ever ready at the call of pleasure, the slightest excuse availed to keep her away from the house of mourning. When the children were ill and when they had died, the character of the disease was a sufficient reason. She could not run the risk of infection, on account of her own boy; and then, when the mother followed them, she could not leave home because of home-cares which could not be set aside. She tried hard to prevail upon Patience to stay with her, but Patience would not be persuaded. It seemed to her that she was

more needed by her brother Amos just at that time; so she went.

To tell the truth, however, Patience went with extreme reluctance. It was not that she shrank from the call of duty, but she could not bear to leave little Philip, who always turned to her from every one else, as though he had already learned that in her arms alone he could be sure to find comfort and protection.

When she had first entered her brother's house with the idea of making it her home, this baby-boy, Philip, had been the chief inducement. With her beautiful sister-in-law she had never had any congenial tastes. Ella was too shallow, too artificial, too selfish, to suit Patience. Patience seemed to Ella prosy, commonplace, and dull. The trifles of gossip and fashion and dress which engrossed Ella's whole mind and whole time did not in the least interest Patience.

Ella was older in years, but she had

never grown out of her babyhood. She could not use her reason, she could not deny herself. She must be petted, she must be amused; and cares fell as lightly away from her as they did from her infant son. A true woman pities the man who has one of these grown-up babies for a wife; and Patience pitied Joseph. She pitied still more the little baby who looked, but looked in vain, to this big baby for mother-love. Not that Ella did not love the child in her way; only it was such a poor way! She liked to deck him with embroideries and laces, to play with him when he was good, to talk of him in a sentimental manner, and to exhibit him to her fashionable friends. But when he was fretful or tired, or troublesome in any way, the sentence of banishment was instantly passed, and he was borne shrieking to the nursery in the arms of his nurse.

Patience could not bear this. She had

always loved the little ones, and had ever been ready to shelter them and brood them and sympathize with them. This boy, Philip, was at once taken to her very heart, for she saw that Joseph had been right when he said, "The boy does not thrive." The child was too pale and too still by half, and there was a look of mournful entreaty in his large dark eyes which made her long to catch him in her arms and cry over him whenever he came in her way.

She tried to awaken Ella's anxiety about him, but Ella only laughed. "How fanciful you are, Patience!" she said. "No one but you has ever said that anything was amiss with my baby. He is an aristocratic-looking little creature; I should not like him half so well if he were a great, vulgar, red-and-white child. And, as to his being naturally quiet, I rejoice in the fact: my nerves are weak, and a noisy child would drive me distracted."

"But he ought to play and laugh and spring," said Patience. "I do not think his nurse takes any pains to amuse him; he sits still half the time."

"She is a most experienced nurse," said Ella. "I do not pretend to interfere with her management. She knows more about babies than I do, I am sure."

"You do not forbid me to visit the nursery, I hope?" said Patience. "I am so fond of babies that I cannot keep away from them."

"Do anything you like," said Ella, carelessly. "Joseph will be enchanted if you notice the child. I never saw a man so silly about a baby; he is really disposed to quarrel with me because I do not fuss over him more."

Patience did not hesitate to avail herself of the permission thus given, but she soon saw that her presence in the nursery was not desired by the nurse, who was a fine-looking woman, very neat in her

dress and always speaking in a soft tone of voice; but Patience did not like the expression of her eyes.

When Philip first sprang into the arms of his new friend with some appearance of enthusiasm, she was evidently displeased. "Take care, miss," she said; "do not crush his robe. Madame is always so particular about his robe."

"I will be careful," said Patience. "But I think the little fellow is tired with sitting still; a frolic with his auntie will do him good;" and she continued to hold him in her arms and to amuse him, though she received many hints to stop.

"I have my own methods, miss," said the nurse. "It does not do to stir a baby up too much. When they will be quiet, it is better to leave them to themselves. If people begin to play with them as you are doing, they soon learn to expect it, and give twice as much trouble to those that have the care of them."

Patience in Ruth's Nursery. Page 100.

"But why should they not expect it?" said Patience. "This little fellow needs change and exercise and fun to strengthen him and make him grow. I am sure I love to play with him."

The woman's face flushed. "That is all very well for you, miss," she said, with a look of sullen resentment, "but the child is heavy; and perhaps, if you had the care of him all the time, you would not so much enjoy holding him."

Patience only answered by pressing the soft little cheek against hers and folding the baby closer to her loving heart, and the soft arms clung about her neck as if they would never let her go.

This was the beginning of the new love which soon became one of the most engrossing sentiments of her life; and thus it was that it was her first thought on returning from the funeral to ask how little Philip had fared during her absence.

"He is as cross as he can be," said Ella,

in a complaining voice. "It seems to me as if he has cried more than half the time. The nurse says it is all your fault; she says you have spoiled him."

"It is more likely that his teeth are troubling him," said Patience. "Mother's babies were always fretful when they were cutting their teeth, and I noticed before I went away that his gums were swollen."

"Oh, well, it may be that," said Ella. "Of course I know nothing about babies; I only know that his continual fretting made my head ache, and yesterday I told the nurse that if she could not manage to keep him quiet I must find some one who could."

"That was rather hard, I think," said Patience.

"There is nothing like taking a firm stand with these people," said Ella, flinging back her head with an air of scornful assertion. "The woman is well paid just to take care of that one child, and of

course I expect her to do it. I notice that since I spoke so decidedly I have hardly heard him cry at all. But do stop talking about it now, and tell me what is the matter with this sleeve. I really would hardly dare to mention what I paid for the making of this dress; yet this morning, when I put it on for the first time, I saw right away that there was something wrong with the sleeves. If there is one thing in the world that I hate, it is to have a sleeve set badly."

She turned from the mirror with a look of care and perplexity worthy of a subject of such importance; but Patience had already thrown aside her wraps and was on her way to the nursery.

The nurse was standing in the hall enjoying a little lively chat with one of the housemaids. She started when she saw Patience, and hastily returned to her post.

Patience followed her into the room. All was quiet; a strange, oppressive still-

ness it seemed to her. She was fairly pining to hear once more the voice of her darling.

She approached the bed, but ere she had reached it the nurse interposed her own person. "The child is sleeping, miss," she said; "he has been very worrisome with his teeth. It is better not to disturb him."

But Patience thrust her aside almost rudely in her eagerness as she said, "I will not disturb him, but I must see him. I must have one sight of his dear little face."

And then she saw him lying in his crib with great dark circles under his closed eyes and a strange pinched look about his pretty mouth. Her heart almost stopped its beating in her sudden fear. She caught him hastily in her arms and pressed her lips to the cold, pale cheeks. "Philip!" she cried. "My darling! Oh, my darling! He is very ill. I do believe that he is dying."

"'Dying'!" said the nurse, with an incredulous air. Then, as she saw that his beautiful head fell back upon his aunt's shoulder and she caught a full view of his pitiful little face, she too began to tremble.

The housemaid heard the noise and came running in. "Is anything the matter with the baby?" she said. Then she saw his face and broke into loud cries and lamentations. She was a young girl, impulsive and indiscreet, but she had a warm heart. "Oh, what could have given him the bad turn?" she cried. "And he so well but this very morn!—Can it have been the drops you gave him, Marie?"

At these words Marie turned upon her fiercely, and Patience said, "'Drops'! What drops? Has any one been giving him any drops?"

The nurse regained her self-command: "It was only a few drops of peppermint, miss, that I gave him to ease his pain.

Bridget saw me giving them to him. It is that which she means."

She winked to Bridget to confirm her statement, but the girl either did not understand or would not heed her. "I do not mean them at all," she said. "I mean the drops you gave him to make him sleep."

At this moment Patience heard her brother's step upon the stairs. He was coming up to see his boy. She ran out into the hall with the child in her arms; the rush of colder air revived him somewhat. He opened his eyes and looked up into his father's face with a languid smile.

"Is the child ill?" cried Joseph. "Why does he look so strangely?"

"Oh, do not ask any questions," said Patience. "Do go at once for the nearest doctor. This wicked woman has given him something. I do not know what, but he seems to be better. We may yet save him."

In her excitement she hardly knew what she was saying.

Joseph was even more excited than she was. He turned fiercely upon Marie. "Woman," he said, "what have you been giving my child?"

But Marie had regained her composure when she saw that the boy was not dead, and that he was in no immediate danger of dying. She was now prepared to justify herself. "I only gave him a few drops of laudanum," she said. "I have often done it before. It is nothing to make a fuss about; he will come out of it all right when he has slept it off."

Mr. Joseph Hosmer was a man of a violent temper, although he usually kept it under control. He quite lost that control now as he caught her by the arm and shook her roughly. "You have given my boy laudanum!" he said. "And you dare to look me in the face and tell me so?"

"It was the mother that set her on," said the housemaid: "I heard her tell Marie that she must stop the child from crying or she would lose her place. And Marie said, 'I know of only one way to do it. The sleeping-drops always quiet him. I will double the dose.' She did not mean to harm him, and, for me, I thought the drops were good for him."

"The mother"! Strange to say, in this hour of danger and fear no one had thought of the mother. But the unusual commotion had excited Ella's curiosity, and she here made her appearance. Then there was a scene—hysterical sobbing and lamentations to which the husband hardly vouchsafed the least notice. Then words were spoken between the husband and the wife which could never be recalled. Ella, for the first time in her life, heard some plain truths about herself, and Joseph found out that his charming wife had a temper which it was

not well to provoke. Marie was dismissed by the angry father, and went out muttering that he was a brute and no gentleman.

In the mean time, Patience and Bridget had been doing all in their power to arouse little Philip and to restore the circulation of the blood to his limp frame, and they were rewarded by seeing the color coming back to his pale face and the natural look to his grave, dark eyes. His first conscious act was to put up one little hand and stroke the face of Patience as she bent over him; his next was to nestle down in her arms and lay his head upon her breast. And he it was who acted the part of peacemaker, for as the angry voices reached his ear they disturbed him, and he said, "Oh, papa, do not scold mamma! Pretty mamma!"

Which remonstrance made Joseph ashamed of his lack of self-control and brought Ella to his side in a sudden gush of ten-

derness. "My boy," she said—"my beautiful boy! If he had died, it would have broken my heart!" and she sobbed so violently that even Patience began to believe in her sincerity.

Then the question came up, Who is to take charge of the baby till another nurse can be found?

"I cannot do it," said Ella; "I do not know how. I never had the care of babies, and I know nothing about them."

"I shall never dare to trust him to another nurse," said Joseph. "I have had my suspicions of Marie from the first."

Then Patience spoke: "Give me the care of him. I will be his nurse if you will allow it."

"You!" cried Ella. "You could never stand it; it would wear you out."

"You!" cried Joseph. "Oh, if you only will, there is nothing on earth that I will not do for you."

Ella again protested against it. She did not half like the idea; she was already vexed that the baby had learned to love Patience so well. She was of a jealous temper and craved the first place in her boy's heart, although she did not care to take too much trouble to win it. "Patience is very good," she said, "but what would people say if we were to shut your sister up in the nursery like a regular hired nurse? It is not to be thought of."

Joseph looked troubled at this; he did not wish to be selfish, and he had not yet learned to be independent of the speech of the people even in the management of his own affairs.

But Patience laughed as she said, "I am quite willing to brave the world's opinion for the sake of little Philip. No one can love him any better than I do, and I am sure he will be happier with me than with any one else. I would not mind shut-

ting myself up in the nursery for his sake, but it will not be necessary. I know a nice young girl who will assist me in the care of him; she can carry him out when he needs exercise, help to amuse him in the daytime and sit by him when he is sleeping. I claim merely the position of head-nurse, with all the care and all the responsibility."

"It will seem very strange," said Ella, coldly. "Besides, I should not like to trust my child to a young girl of whom I know nothing. I would prefer an experienced woman."

An impatient exclamation from Joseph interrupted her. "I have had enough of experienced women," he said. "Do let Patience manage this thing for you. If you cannot take care of your child yourself, be glad that there is some one who can who is willing to do it."

"The young girl of whom I spoke," said Patience, "is well known to me. She

has excellent principles, is gentle in her manners, and is very fond of children; she will be wholly under my direction, and will do just what I tell her to. I do not think you need be anxious, Ella."

"Say no more about it," said Joseph; "the matter is settled."

When he spoke with such decision, every one understood that further argument would be useless; so Ella yielded gracefully to the inevitable, and Patience took the baby to her loving heart.

The young girl came, was all that could be desired, and the plan worked well. The boy had found a mother and began to thrive. His cheeks grew rosy and his bursts of laughter rang merrily through the house. Joseph rejoiced in the change, and Ella was forced to admit that it was an improvement.

But after that first real quarrel causes of dissension were frequently arising between the husband and the wife. He mov-

ed onward in intellect and endeavor; she seemed rather on the decline in these respects. He was constantly growing less lavish in the expenditure of money which he thought could better be used in his business; she grew more careless in this, as in everything else. In short, harmony and romance had vanished from this hearth and home. Love in some sort was still there, but confidence had been destroyed. Joseph was proud of Ella's beauty, and liked to see the admiration which was excited by her winning, graceful ways; Ella rejoiced to know that her husband was honored among men; but there were often high words between them, and the rich man had frequent cause to feel that his way was through the desert though his feet were encased in golden slippers and his staff was a staff of gold.

Patience did all that she could to make his life happy, and little Philip also played his part well; but the disappointed, world-

worn man often looked back to the time when his bare feet had pressed the soft grass, and his soul was filled with a yearning that was almost akin to pain. He felt that somehow he had failed to secure the chief treasures of life, and sometimes was conscious of strong impulses toward those higher, better fortunes which his father had set before him, both by precept and by example, as the only true aim.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. ASHTON'S NEW EXPERIENCE.

MRS. ASHTON was even more popular as the mistress of her handsome city-house than she had been as Ruth the country minister's pretty daughter. Her dream of bliss seemed fulfilled, and her life was all sunshine. She gave parties, and went to parties; she had her box at the opera; she bought any trifle that came in her way, to adorn either her house or her person, without regard to expense. Charity was her aider and abettor in all her plans. She was so bright and so witty, at once a lively companion and a reliable helper.

Mr. Ashton continued to admire and to indulge his wife. She often said "that it

was a splendid thing to be married," and, with a reckless disregard of the consequences to herself, advised Charity to give a favorable response to one of the gentlemen who frequented the house with an evident desire to make a good impression upon that young lady. But the least allusion to this subject at once made Charity as sober and sarcastic and repellent as she had been in the old times. Ruth at length told her husband that she had never seen a girl who seemed to be so set against marriage as was this young sister of hers.

It never once occurred to Ruth that this prosperity might not last or that anything might happen to bring it to a sudden end. It is true that Mr. Ashton had more than once spoken to one of the servants with a look and tone which had made her quail; it is true that, on the occurrence of some trifling defect in the housekeeping, he had alluded to it with a withering sarcasm which had caused

Charity's cheeks to flush painfully, and which had stirred that young lady's temper considerably; but the tiger's paws had always had a velvet touch for Ruth, and had never given her the slightest scratch.

The sorrows of her family had touched Ruth but lightly. She had shed some bitter tears over Amos and the sudden shipwreck of his fortunes, but Mr. Ashton kissed them away and at once planned some amusement calculated to divert her thoughts. She had become gradually estranged from this brother in the years of separation which neither had tried to bridge over by written communications. His children she had known but slightly, and, to use her own expression, "somehow she could never get on with Mary." She had shivered and been indignant when she had heard about the narrow escape of Joseph's boy, and had said some severe things about Ella's

neglect; but the real danger had gone by before she had known anything about it. And, as for Paul, her heart was hardened against him. Without the least excuse, he had disgraced them all. If he were dead, she hoped that he had repented of his sins before it was too late; if he were living, she was glad that he kept out of the way of his family: it was the very best thing he could do. So this beautiful butterfly skimmed lightly along in the sunshine, touching a flower here and there just long enough to extract its sweets, and took no thought of care for the future.

But not the less surely were clouds beginning to sail in the serene skies, and disturbing elements were gathering their forces for the storms that were coming.

The first cloud that came was hardly bigger than a man's hand.

Mrs. Ashton had been to two balls in

one night. She had enjoyed them both, had danced till she was forced to sit down from sheer fatigue, had favored one urgent host with one of her beautiful songs, and had safely reached her home, when, as she was crossing the hall, she was suddenly smitten down as by a violent blow, and fainted. Her adoring husband caught her in his arms and carried her up stairs. Charity flew to his assistance; they laid her upon her own bed and administered proper restoratives. Very soon she sat up and laughed at her mishap and at their fears. She laughed, but there was too much excitement in her mirth, her eyes looked very large and dark, and her face did not regain its natural color.

"You have tired yourself out, my love," said her anxious husband. "Have I not always warned you against the danger you incur by letting your wild spirits run away with you?"

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"You really must be more careful, Ruth," said Charity.

"I shall be quite well to-morrow," said Ruth, nestling down among her soft pillows with the pretty air of a spoiled child. "What a fuss you make about a fainting-fit! Some ladies are always ready to faint on the slightest provocation; they think it is interesting."

"They make a feint of doing it, perhaps," said Mr. Ashton, laughing, "but you favored us with the real thing. I hope you will not try it again. I do not like sick people; they are too depressing to the spirits."

"Thank you for letting me know," said Ruth. "I will take care to keep well."

So they laughed it off.

Ruth was better in the morning, but was conscious of a languor which made her hate to move. Charity tried to persuade her to yield to the feeling, but she would persist in getting up. "Mr. Ashton would

not enjoy his breakfast unless I should pour out his coffee for him, as usual," she said.

"He would not mind just for one morning, I am sure," persisted Charity.

"I thank you, I *should* mind very much indeed, Miss Charity; but, of course, if Mrs. Ashton is really ill, I would not wish her to exert herself on my account."

There was a shade of coldness in his manner which impelled Ruth to disclaim the illness and make an effort to appear as usual. When she had taken a cup of strong coffee, she was so much better that she went out to pay one or two morning-calls, and in the evening she accompanied her husband to the theatre.

"There is nothing so bad for a person who is a little out of sorts as to sit down and mope," Mr. Ashton said; and Ruth had not the least inclination to resist him in this. She liked change and amusement even better than he did.

So she went on for a few days, and had almost forgotten her first attack, when she had a second, of a more alarming character. The fainting-fit lasted longer and was more prostrating in its after-effects.

A physician was called, and was very decided in his opinion that Mrs. Ashton needed rest and quiet. Unless she was prepared to risk an utter break-down, late hours and evening-entertainments must be given up for the season.

Mr. Ashton now took the alarm, and insisted upon it that the doctor's advice must be followed; so Ruth was compelled to refuse all invitations and settle down to domestic life. At first she rather enjoyed it. It was a new thing, and novelty always had a charm for her. Then, Mr. Ashton devoted himself to her and petted her, and that was pleasant. But as time wore on Mr. Ashton's manner changed. He lost his anxiety about his wife, and sometimes thought that she might exert

herself at least to entertain him if he gave up so much for her sake. And he was right. She often refused to sing because she was not exactly in the mood for it, and she refused to take a hand at whist because it bored her to fix her mind upon the game; and if she did not incline to talk, she discouraged all attempts at conversation. What provoked him the more in all this was that if a visitor chanced to come in, all was changed. His charming wife could laugh and talk and sing with as much animation as ever. Not being in the habit of self-control, the gentleman began to be cold and sarcastic, to hint that his home was dull, and to find fault with every trifling discomfort in a fashion which made him an exceedingly disagreeable inmate. Ruth was not slow to perceive this, and to resent it. She grew nervous and peevish, and was ready to give way to tears on the slightest provocation. So the silvery light of the honeymoon was gradually ob-

scured by a gray mist which hung more and more heavily upon the sky.

Of course there was fault on both sides, as there usually is where two selfish, ill-regulated natures begin to jar. The love was there; neither the husband nor the wife had reached the point of indifference. Mr. Ashton was unhappy when Ruth wept, and Ruth yearned for his caresses when they were for a time withdrawn; but she had learned by experience that the claws which the velvet paws concealed were exceeding sharp, and he had learned that his charming Ruth could be both tiresome and provoking.

There had been no quarrel between them, but Mr. Ashton began to spend his evenings elsewhere, and Ruth found his absence rather a relief than otherwise. Left more to herself than she had been in many years, she began to think over many things which she would have been glad to forget. She did not feel very

strong, it tired her to read all the time, and sewing in solitude and silence does not prevent reflection. Thoughts of things past, present and to come thronged in upon her mind, and she could not crowd them out.

Memory drew back the curtain which had so long veiled the past, and Ruth saw in a new light many of the pictures thus revealed. She saw her father as he sat in the old kitchen with the soul-light in his face as from God's own word he read to his family of the world to come. She saw the group of merry boys and girls who listened half in awe and half in impatience for the hour of devotions to be over. Among the group she saw herself, the elder sister, more restless, more impatient, than any of the others. She caught herself once more giving a sly glance of encouragement to her brothers when they ventured upon some piece of quiet mischief, or to the little ones when

they talked or laughed aloud; she saw herself with a heart full of wandering fancies as she knelt by her father's side; she saw herself impatiently throw down the bars of holy restraint which such an hour as this would have raised about her to withhold her from rushing out of the only safe fold. She saw, and sighed and turned away her eyes. It had all seemed to her but natural and innocent then, an engaging exhibition of youthful spirit; but, looking back upon it through the vista of years, she did not like the picture.

Then there came up before her another vision of the sunny kitchen, with her mother as the central figure, and herself and Patience and Charity as helpers in the household tasks. She saw the look of appeal in her mother's tired, flushed face, as she ever took the heaviest part of the burden. She saw Patience ever answering to that appeal with cheerful alacrity, while Charity, though sharp in speech

and in manner, was prompt and energetic in the discharge of duties which were assigned to her.

Again she saw herself, the elder sister, flying out at the side door for a romp in the barn with the boys; stealing off, when unobserved, to hide in the attic, that she might trim a bonnet at her leisure; wasting half an hour while admiring her own pretty face and flowing hair in the mirror which hung in the spare-room; or dropping every duty at a call from Ella Thornton to drive or to visit. She saw the look of love with which her mother released her, the look of love with which Patience offered to perform her neglected duties; she saw Charity's temper ever growing more sharp and hard under these provocations.

Again she turned away her eyes. Once she had thought it bright and spirited to shirk the things that were distasteful to her, and to allow others to bear them

for her; but now it all seemed different, and she was forced to confess to herself that she did not like the picture.

Then there came a third vision of the old kitchen, when the household tasks were done, and the lights were bright in the social evening-hour, and the minister talked and laughed and played with the children grouped around the hearth. Then she saw herself once more, plunged into some favorite book or lost in some foolish reverie, and saw the little ones come to her for a caress or a story; they held out their loving arms to her, the elder sister, and she pushed them aside, carelessly or peevishly according to her mood; and the prayer was denied, and the tears sprang to the dewy eyes as the little ones turned away to be comforted by Patience. But this picture she could not look upon; it was so hateful to her! Oh, how could she ever have treated them so—Esther, that baby whom every one loved, and

Faith, the gentle, unselfish darling whom God had taken out of the world?

And so the pictures came on in rapid review.

The poorer home, with the father gone and the mother sick, discouraged and faint of heart—there she was again, the elder daughter, playing the part of a spoiled child, thrusting every little care or worry into her mother's face at every turn, always bemoaning her own privations, disagreeable, unreasonable, selfish, till with reckless impatience she had flung herself out of the home-life altogether. Then, in her new home, her careless performance of duty, her coldness to the children whom she might have influenced for good, her ill-veiled contempt for Mrs. Hovey, were not pleasant to reflect upon. All these opportunities for usefulness had gone by unheeded, unimproved.

There was another vision, which she liked the least of any. It was a picture

of herself as she had first bowed down in her father's church and given herself to God with an earnest purpose to serve him always in a consecrated life. Could it be that she had ever really felt that glow of love and ardent desire? Had she not in some way deceived herself? If she had taken those vows, were they not yet binding? She fairly groaned aloud when *these* thoughts obtruded themselves upon her. She was often tempted to wish that she could blot this passage quite out of her life.

Charity, coming in to sit with Ruth or to read to her, often found her in tears. At first she seemed not to notice anything amiss, and exerted herself to be all the more bright and entertaining as Ruth's depression increased; but at length she could not help speaking. "Ruth," she said, "what is the matter with you? You are fretting yourself about something. Will you not tell me what it is?"

Ruth shook her head. "There is nothing to tell," she said—"at least, nothing of any consequence."

"People do not usually cry their eyes out about nothing," said Charity, dryly. "Are you grieving over any of Mr. Ashton's sayings or doings?"

"Mercy, no!" said Ruth. "It is no wonder he goes out to find amusement, when he has so little at home. And I am learning not to mind his sarcastic speeches; he does not mean anything by them."

Charity thought that they were very disagreeable, but she did not say so. She only repeated her question: "What is it, then, dear? Is it because you are tired of staying at home?"

"Partly that," said Ruth, "but mostly because I am so horrid. I am beginning perfectly to hate myself."

"Nonsense!" cried Charity. "Who says that you are horrid? You are getting

morbid, to indulge in such fancies. If I could repeat to you but half the compliments which I hear when you are spoken of, you would hold up your head and never shed another tear."

Ruth smiled, and a little grateful thrill went through her at the mention of the compliments. But the smile was succeeded by a sigh. "No one knows me as I know myself," she said. "Oh, Charity, if I had my life to live over again, I would be a very different woman."

CHAPTER VII.

SAMUEL HOSMER'S TROUBLES.

MR. SAMUEL HOSMER was a good, earnest, true man, and every one knew that he was to be wholly trusted. As a minister of the gospel he was not what his father had been: that was conceded by all who had known them both. His talents were not so great, his voice and elocution were not so fine, his appearance was not so imposing, his knowledge was not so deep. Yet he was better known as a preacher than had been his father, who, called in his youth to a small country parish, had never found his way out to a larger field. He had ever been looked up to as a superior by the simple people among whom he had dwelt, and the few who made more pretensions to

wealth and influence pronounced him a wonderful man whose powers were almost wasted among the rugged wilds. They said he was "worthy of a better place;" but he never was called to it till he received the call to go up above and take from the Master's own hand the reward for long years of faithful service.

But this young Samuel, his less-gifted son, had gone directly into the wider field where men who could appreciate him knew and approved his work. And he did work with a will, for his whole heart was *in* his work. He visited among his people; he studied early and late; he preached living, stirring sermons; he was very strict in his habits of life; he organized new systems of working; he looked after the poor, and had more benevolent schemes than he could ever hope to carry out. He was not hampered by poverty, as his worthy father had been. He did not know what it was to wear a suit of clothes till

it was almost worn away by frequent brushing, or to go without a thick overcoat because of the emptiness of his pocket-book. He did not know what it was to hold back the contribution which his generous spirit longed to give, or to throw it in with the rest wondering whether it were right or wrong to do so. No; he had a large salary —more than sufficient for his needs; and Mr. Wilson, the man who had given him his education from friendship to his father and from love to God, was rich and had loved him too well not to secure him from want. He was always as well dressed as it became his position to be, and, being young and good-looking, he took a certain pleasure in the consciousness that such was the fact.

His church was well filled. He had a vivid, simple style that men generally liked. His sermons were not too long; they were neither over-deep nor over-learned. He generally took a short, pointed text

that was in itself well calculated to fix the attention. His deductions from the text were direct and earnest. There was a tone in his voice and a glance in his eye which told that he was firm in his own convictions of the truth of every word that he uttered, and his people knew that his life harmonized with his preaching; so they were well satisfied with their minister. They were constant in their attendance at church; they listened to him with attention; they proclaimed everywhere that they considered themselves fortunate in having secured the services of so good a man.

And he had other triumphs such as gladden a young man's heart. He had formed congenial friendships with old and young people alike. This had been a surprise to his brothers and sisters, for Samuel, though good as gold, was undeniably too reserved and stiff in his manners. But with many his real worth atoned for this. The children liked him because he came

into the Sabbath-school and talked to them in a way which they understood; the older men liked him because he was so sensible and practical; the younger men, because he was so animated and filled with zeal; the ladies— Well, why was it that the ladies liked him? They did not give any particular reason for it, but the fact was evident. If it would have helped him to have had a cartload of worked slippers and fancy sermon-covers sent to him, they would have been at his disposal, and he had more invitations to dinner and to tea than he could possibly accept.

Yet, with all these advantages, this young minister felt that his way was "through the desert," for the two special desires upon which his heart was set were not gratified. He longed for a home. He had one of those reserved natures which instinctively shrink at the touch of a stranger's hand. When his brothers had grown impatient to be out and to be off with other

boys, he had been content to sit with his father in his study-hours or to linger near his mother and his sisters. It had required all David's buoyant spirit to rouse him from this state of content and to make him play with the boys in the neighborhood. Without the home-life and the home-affections, he felt that the best part of his nature was shut up within himself and could never expand nor grow. He was forced to admit that he was not entirely happy in his boarding-house, in spite of his pleasant rooms, his books, the worked slippers and the cordial greetings which were ever accorded to him. Plainer fare would have suited him better if shared with those whom he loved and who loved him.

He tried to persuade Patience to come and keep house for him, but Patience refused. "Joseph needs me more than you do," she said.

"I cannot see that," said Samuel. "You

would have a wider field of usefulness with me; there is so much to do in my parish in which your help would be invaluable to me. And it would be work, too, which is just suited to you."

"That may be," said Patience; "but my present mission seems to be to care for Joseph's boy. I really cannot leave little Philip."

"I should think you might leave him to his mother," persisted Samuel. "And, as to Joseph, he has his boy and his home and his wife; surely that ought to be enough for him. I am convinced that every minister ought to be able to invite his people to visit him in his own house."

"That being the case, why not take a wife of your own, Samuel?" said Patience, smiling.

Samuel blushed at the very suggestion. This idea had not occurred to him. He had been very much engrossed with his work, and his natural shyness had prevent-

ed him from becoming intimately acquainted with any young lady. Now that Patience had directed his mind to the subject, however, he found it coming back to it quite often as he sat in his lonely parlor, and the plan commended itself to him. Of course his wife would have to be grave, quiet and domestic. She would have to be something like Patience, capable and experienced—one who could take the lead in the female prayer-meeting, organize a sewing-society and speak a word of welcome to strangers who came to the church.

There was Miss Jane Baker, for instance; he did not know her very well, but he was sure she was sensible and discreet. She was an earnest Christian and always ready to go forward in every good work. How suitably she dressed, too! Never too much, never too extravagantly. He wondered that he had never sought a nearer acquaintance with Miss Jane. She had always been very friendly when he

had met her, and he had greatly enjoyed her conversation. She would make an excellent wife for him, if he could only persuade her to think so. Now that he thought of it, he had been rather neglectful in not speaking a word of encouragement to her now and then as to her faithful work in the Sabbath-school: almost any other minister would have done so. He resolved to atone for this neglect on the very next Sunday.

But, alas! how often a man's plans are defeated by some trifling circumstance!

As the minister went slowly down the aisle on the following Sabbath, with his eyes fixed on Miss Jane, who was looking like a fair young saint as she spoke a parting word to her class of unruly boys, what must giddy Carrie Flanders do but rush from her seat, stumble and almost fall at his very feet?—Carrie Flanders, in the biggest of fashionable hats, with a fringe of fluffy curls about her face and a color

in her cheeks which the roses might have envied.

What could the minister do but save her from a fall and then help her to gather up the armful of books which had been scattered in every direction by her mishap? And then, as she stood there with that timid, frightened air, how could he fail to say a pleasant word or two to reassure and comfort her? In answer to which, she glanced up at him with a laugh and a blush and thanked him in a graceful, girlish way that was very bewitching. Meeting the full glance of those starry eyes and listening to the clear tones of that very sweet voice, he wondered that he had never before noticed how very pretty Carrie was.

But Carrie did not linger to be either admired or censured. She was in a hurry, as she generally was: "Excuse me, Mr. Hosmer, for being so careless, and excuse me for leaving you rather abrupt-

ly now. I am in a hurry to change these books for my class. I do not know how any one could choose such grave books for little ones."

Another laugh, another careless bow, and she rushed away.

Then Mr. Hosmer turned to look for Miss Jane, but she had left the church. "Oh, well, I can do it next Sunday," he thought as he turned to go to his boarding-house.

Somehow, he was not at all inclined to be impatient at the delay, and, somehow, he found himself thinking of Carrie rather than of Jane as he sat by the fire that evening. He knew something of the circumstances of this young girl, and he feared that her position was trying for one who was a professor of religion.

Mr. and Mrs. Flanders were both very worldly people, and their two elder children had followed closely in their foot-

steps. Carrie had been converted while at boarding-school, and her indulgent parents had not opposed her in her wish to join the church, although they thought it was all nonsense. They had not yet learned to say "No!" to Carrie. Thus the influences of her home-life were all against her. Then she was certainly very pretty; he had never before realized how very pretty she was. And she was rich. How apt rich pretty girls were to be flattered and spoiled! All these things were against her.

Yet she was holding out bravely. He had noticed that her seat in church was seldom vacant, and that she always gave earnest heed to his preaching. It is true that she did deck herself out in feathers and laces, but somehow the gay attire seemed well suited to her fresh young beauty. He wondered if he had done his duty to this lamb of his flock. Mr. and Mrs. Flanders were very friendly to

him, but they had not invited him to visit at their house so often as had most of the other members of the congregation. They were not much in the habit of entertaining ministers, and were constrained and uncomfortable in his presence. Fred Flanders openly ridiculed him, and Emily Flanders said he was so stiff in his manners that she could not endure him. He had felt as if his visits were not much desired, and so had stayed away. Had he not been wrong in thus yielding to natural diffidence and his own pleasure? Was it not a minister's duty to visit *all* his people? and did not a girl like Carrie need a word of encouragement more than Jane Baker, whose father and mother were excellent pious people who carefully trained their children in the right way? As a result of these meditations he decided to visit the Flanders family that very week.

It chanced that when he went to call no

one was at home but Miss Carrie. She was sitting at the parlor window very busy over some pretty piece of fancy-work. The light fell upon the graceful, girlish figure, the glowing cheeks and the fluffy hair. Her dress was a costly silk of a bright, warm color; there were bracelets upon her arms, which were but half concealed by the fall of delicate lace gathered about them; there were diamonds pendent from her shell-like ears, and a diamond pin nestled among the folds of lace about her throat. She did not look at all like a saint; she was more like some gay, bright-plumaged bird singing in the sunshine.

The grave young minister felt that he did not approve of her. She was too much dressed for so young a girl. The Flanders had not always been rich, and they showed it in this. They were too profuse in everything; they did not know what to do with their money. No, he

did not approve of her. And yet, when she lifted her head at the closing of the door and sprang to meet him with that eager haste, when she placed her hand in his and told him how very glad she was to see him, he could not help feeling glad to receive her welcome, nor help acknowledging the fact that she was very, *very* attractive.

"I suppose you are disappointed not to see mamma and Emily, Mr. Hosmer?" she said, "But I am glad that they are out. I have been longing to talk to you this great while about some things that puzzle me, and I cannot talk when mamma and Emily are here, because they do not understand."

The smile faded from her face, and in the clear, sweet voice there was a slight tremor which awakened his sympathy.

Samuel longed to remove her difficulties, whatever they might be, and his re-

serve was at once conquered by her frankness, her friendliness and her appeal to him for help. "Tell me what it is that troubles you," he said, seating himself in the chair which she had placed for him, and feeling as completely at his ease as though he were talking to one of his own sisters.

Carrie laughed, and her laugh was pleasant to listen to, although he had not expected to hear it just then. "It seems absurd in me to speak of troubles," she said. "Emily says that I have never had a real trouble, but I have. I have everything that I ask for, and more than I deserve. Every one is kind to me, all my friends love me, yet I have real troubles that almost break my heart when I fix my mind upon them—troubles in which no one can give me sympathy, no one can give me help."

Again that wistful look clouded the bright young face.

"Have you told them to Jesus?"

She started at the question. "I have," she replied, "but he has not taken them away. It is that which puzzles me. I thought he would. That is my first and deepest trouble: I am afraid I am not the right kind of a Christian. My Christian life has been a disappointment to me from the very beginning. I heard you preach last Sunday about the peace that passeth understanding and a joy which no words can describe. I know nothing of such a peace and such a joy. It seems to me that now I have more worries than I used to have."

"That certainly ought not to be the effect of a religious life," said the young minister, gravely.

"I know it," said Carrie, "but in my case it *is*. I used to be without a care; I had everything I asked for, and I think it is natural for me to be gay and cheerful. I enjoyed my school; the teachers were

always kind to me, and so were the girls. When I left school, I thought I should have splendid times with Fred and Emily, but, now that I am at home, I cannot help thinking about things and wondering whether they are right. You know none of my family profess to be religious, and on that very account it is important for me to be very careful what I say and do. Fred makes fun of Christians now, and says they are not any better than other people; and I am so afraid he judges them all by me."

She was speaking in a low tone and there was a dreamy, half-forgetful look in her eyes, as though she were hardly conscious of his presence.

She started when he said, "Surely, Miss Carrie, you are not sorry you have chosen your part with the Lord's people? You would not go back?"

"Oh no!" she said, with an energy which sent the blood in a still richer

glow to her rosy cheeks; "nothing could tempt me to go back. I shall never forget how I felt when I heard the girls at school singing 'Heaven is my home' and realized that I could not join them because I knew that it would not be *mine* at all unless I were quite different. They looked so happy, and I felt that I was shut out. And then the thought of what it would be to see the joy of those who passed in at the gates of pearl, and for me to have no right to go in with them, came to me. Oh, it was terrible! I cried almost all one night just for thinking of it, and so did my room-mate; for she was no better off than I was. We knew that we were not good enough, and it did not seem as if we ever could be any better; and no one even spoke to *us* as if we could care about it. We did not dare to speak, either, till a minister came who preached from the text, 'Whosoever will, let him come.' I never heard such a sermon. He

made it all so clear! Even while he was preaching I knew that Jesus died for *me*, and that he invited me to come without waiting to be any better; and I decided that my choice was made. I told my roommate, and she felt just as I did. Oh, it was such a happy, *happy* time for both of us!"

"Then it seems that you have known something of the joy?" said Samuel, smiling.

"Then? Why, of course I did. I went to one of the teachers, and she was a good woman. She came to our room and talked to us so beautifully! She said that our sins were all forgiven for Christ's dear sake; that he was our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Righteousness. She said that we had only to love him, to trust in him and to try to do his will day by day. She said we must fight against sin, strive to put it away from us and endure unto the end. And I will—I *will!* Let what

will happen, I will never give up. I have chosen Christ, to serve him now and for ever."

Her whole face expressed the firmness of her decision. With that light in her dark eyes and that smile upon her lips, she was dangerously beautiful.

Samuel Hosmer, however, was less attracted by her beauty than by sympathy with the feelings she expressed and a strong desire to give her help and comfort. "Miss Carrie," he said, "if you are sincere in what you say—and I am convinced that you are—I think you may lay aside one of your troubles for ever. You are the right kind of a Christian."

She turned upon him one grateful glance, but then she sighed and shook her head. "You do not know all," she said. "I long to have a Christlike spirit, but I am so easily turned aside. Fred laughs at me, and laughs at religion. I ought to be patient and try to win him to a better

way of thinking, but I get angry and say sharp things and hurt his feelings. And then he says my religion has spoiled my temper, and that he never means to be a Christian, since it makes people so cross; and that cuts me to the heart. I would rather do anything than make people think less of religion because of my behavior. Besides, I want Fred to be a Christian, and mamma and papa and Emily. They must be, you know, or they cannot go to heaven. Oh, I cannot endure even to think of them staying away from the Saviour and being lost at last. Mr. Hosmer, I do hope you will pray for them. I am praying for them all the time, but it may be that your prayers will prevail with God when mine do not."

"I will—I do," said the minister, deeply moved; and, almost before he knew it, he was telling her of his own troubles—how he longed to see souls converted through his preaching, and how little he cared to

hear people praise his sermons if they could turn away and forget them; how he was afraid the fault was in himself; how he would like to do more for Christ than he had ever done. He had never spoken so freely, even to Patience, but Carrie's frank confidence had so melted his reserve that it seemed almost impossible not to be equally frank in return.

Carrie listened with eager sympathy. She could understand it all: she too longed to be of some use. She seemed to be leading an aimless life: that was one most bitter disappointment to her. She had meant to be so very different from what she was.

The call was brought to an end by the sudden entrance of Miss Emily. Of course it was an interruption when she began to rattle on in her gay manner about every indifferent subject which occurred to her.

Mr. Hosmer hardly knew whether or not he had helped Carrie, but he knew

that he had been much cheered by her sympathy and had received a new impetus in his work.

After this he went to see Miss Jane Baker, and he found her a very sensible young woman, and she talked to him very properly about her Sunday-school class. Mrs. Baker invited him to stay to tea, and made him feel quite at home. He knew in his heart that Miss Jane was in all respects just the one to make a model minister's wife; but Carrie Flanders had stumbled into his life, and he could not thrust her out. In vain did he try to fix his mind upon Miss Jane. There was Carrie, with her radiant face and earnest eyes and fluffy hair. He felt impelled to watch her in the Sabbath-school, and noticed how eagerly the little ones in her class gathered about her and hung upon her words. In the evening-meeting he felt constrained to speak to her a word of encouragement and cheer; and one night, as

he yielded to an impulse to accompany her home, he suddenly found himself telling her that he had loved her from the very first, and that in all the world she was the only woman whom he ever had loved. And Carrie made a discovery in her turn: she found that here was the earthly help which she needed, and that her whole heart responded to the love thus offered her.

Oh how sweet was the dream of love which was destined to last but a few brief hours! For when Mr. Samuel Hosmer went to Mr. Flanders to ask him for his daughter, the answer was a cold and firm rejection of his suit; and when Carrie herself begged him, with tears, to reconsider this decision, it was found the indulgent father could say "No!" even to Carrie.

From this moment the roses began to fade in Carrie's cheeks, and the minister felt that he was called to go to Jerusalem by the way which is desert.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL'S NEW HOME AND NEW NAME.

MR. WEAVER was the first person who discovered Paul Hosmer's condition. He came out into the kitchen at an early hour to make up a fire before his wife was stirring. When he had first married her, she was esteemed by her neighbors as "not very rugged," and this good husband had ever since done his best to shield her from all exposures and heavy burdens. Now she was strong and well and plump, but he relaxed none of his tender care; and perhaps it was owing to this that she bore her years so well and enjoyed such uniform good health.

Paul was resting upon the old calico-covered lounge. They had placed him there

partly because he hardly seemed the sort of guest to introduce into the spare-room, which was furnished with all the elegances which the house contained, and partly that he might be more comfortable than he could have been in all that cold splendor.

The farmer raked open the bed of glowing coals and built up his fire. Then he laid his hand on Paul's shoulder. "Rouse yourself, young man," he said, "and come out to the sink and take a wash. It may not be civil to tell you so, but you look as if you just now needed that more than anything."

He gave Paul a rough though not unfriendly shake, but he was answered only by a slight moan as Paul turned his head uneasily upon his pillow.

The farmer was proceeding to give him a second and harder shaking, when Mrs. Weaver bustled in to begin about the breakfast. "This tramp of ours is pretty

well tuckered out with yesterday's work," he said. "I cannot make him get up."

But at the second attack Paul began to talk in his sleep. "Is it time to go for the cows, father?" he said. "All right! I'll start in a minute. Just let me take one more little nap."

Mrs. Weaver viewed the case with a more experienced eye. "He is a sick man; that's what's the matter," she said. "He's taken cold out in them snow-banks; and no wonder!"

The farmer did not seem at all pleased with the idea thus presented to him. He looked more closely at the unconscious sleeper, and touched the hand grasping the quilt which covered him. "I shouldn't wonder if he was coming down with a fever," he said. "He seems to be out of his head now, and his hand is just burning. This is a nice fix for us to be in! What are we to do with the man?"

"Nurse him through it," said his wife,

promptly. "I do not know what else we can do."

"We might get him into the poor-house," suggested the husband. "He does not belong to our town, I know, but perhaps, for a consideration—"

"John Weaver, what has come over you?" exclaimed his wife. "After we have been so blessed as Christians all these years, are we to turn into priests and Levites all at once, I should like to know, and pass by on the other side when our neighbor has need of our help?"

John cast an admiring, loving glance at her glowing face, but he affected to grumble still: "What a woman you are to turn Scripture against a man, Mary! I am sure all the Good Samaritan did was to leave the sick man at an inn and pay his way, and that is just what I said I would do. I said 'for a consideration,' remember."

"He did not leave him till he had done

all he possibly could for him," said Mary, promptly. "Of course he could not carry him through the country with him, but he lifted him up, and poured oil into his wounds, and cared for him, and got him into a quiet place; and that is just what I mean to do for this young man. I mean to take as good care of him as I know how. Perhaps he has a mother who is breaking her heart over him now. I should not wonder one bit."

"Well, well, take your own way," grumbled the farmer. "Only if he turns out a thief and a rascal and murders us all in our beds, remember it is none of my doings."

"Poor boy! I'll risk it," said the good woman. "I do not believe that men are so bad as all that comes to. For the stealing part, there isn't so very much in the house to steal, as I know of; and if he had a mind to murder us, there is not much chance of his doing it. He is no

match for a man like you even if he had his full strength."

"And I am no match for a woman like you in an argument," said John, with a hearty laugh; "so have your own way, as I said before. Only do not wear yourself out with nursing, or I shall take the matter into my own hands. Remember, you are not very rugged, and good people are scarce."

Mrs. Weaver had been making active preparations for breakfast while this talk was going on. She was a stirring housekeeper, and no hand to let the work go undone, no matter what the crisis might be. She gave her husband a little loving pat as he finished speaking. "As if I did not know it was in your good heart to do it all this time, you dear old man!" she said. "Sit down now and eat, and then see if you can give the boy a shave. I will make a fire in the spare-room, and we will get him into bed all comfortable

before the doctor comes to take a look at him. Let us do as well by him as if he were our own boy, if it be only for the sake of the dear Lord who has done so much for us."

The result of this was that the rough hair was removed from Paul Hosmer's face, he was carefully washed in warm water, his ragged clothing was removed, and he was placed in a well-warmed bed as comfortable as it could be made.

Even the farmer was stirred to a deeper interest in him when he saw the change which had been effected in his appearance by this process. The wild, haggard look had gone with the dingy complexion and the unkempt hair. The features, which were now clearly revealed, were regular and delicate; the blue veins were easily traced through the fair skin, and the forehead was full and beautifully developed. The bright fever-patch upon the sunken cheeks served to impart an additional bril-

liancy to the eyes, which were of a deep blue and half veiled by long dark lashes.

Mrs. Weaver grew tearful as she looked at him. "We have entertained an angel unawares," she said, softly.

"The angel is in your own eyes, little woman," said her husband; "or, if this be an angel, he has fallen very low."

The doctor came, and pronounced the patient to be in a critical state.

Paul complained bitterly of the pain in his head and side. His breathing was labored, and every now and then there was a fit of coughing that it was distressing to hear. But never had any patient better or more tender nursing. The ministry which was given at first from pity and for the love of Christ grew to be one of real love for the one who needed it.

It was not in the nature of this warm-hearted man and woman to be cold or unloving in any of the relations of life. They loved the dumb creatures who were

their daily care. The cattle, the horses, and even the fat, sleek cat, seemed to know and love them in return. It is not to be supposed that they could sit beside this bed of sickness, and care so tenderly for the sufferer without feeling their sympathies very much drawn out toward him.

The sick man seemed so young to encounter hardship and endure pain; he was so lovely to look upon; the revelations of himself which were brought out in his unconscious ravings were ever so pure and beautiful. The evil which had embittered his later years seemed to have fallen away from him, and he was living in his more distant past. His talk was ever of his father, his mother, his beautiful Ruth, his kind big brother and dear little Faith. It was touching to hear him call upon them, appeal to them for help or, moved by some playful fancy, to jest with them as though he were again a child. It was touching to hear him tell of his desire to find a

place in the world where he could earn money and help his mother, and to hear him beg Patience to ask God to give it to him. Mrs. Weaver was often moved to tears as she listened to him, and her husband was sometimes compelled to pass his rough hand across his eyes to dash away the moisture which he would fain have concealed.

Thus it came about that when Paul struggled slowly back to health, as he did, he found himself with two good, true friends who were deeply interested in his welfare. At first he yielded himself to the pleasant consciousness that this was the fact. But then, with returning strength, more painful thoughts came to him. He knew that he must again go out into the world to earn his own living, but he knew not where to go. He was afraid to trust himself. He grew daily more silent and sad. It was not possible for him to be a hanger-on to the kind people who had

already done so much for him, it was not possible for him to go back to his own people as a beggar and a wreck. At his age it must be possible for him to support himself, but how and where could he find the means to do it?

Mrs. Weaver soon noticed the change in him, and anxiously questioned him as to the cause. He did not tell her all, but he told her enough to make her understand in part what his life had been. She went and told her husband, and then, for the first time, expressed to him her wish that Paul might make his home with them. She thought she was sure of his sympathy in this, but when she had finished speaking he shook his head.

She was really vexed with him. "Why not?" she said. "I am sure, now that we have got used to him, we should both feel lonely enough without him. I have sometimes pleased myself with thinking that God sent him to us to comfort us

for the loss of our Dan. Dan would have been about his age had he lived."

"That is all well enough, looking at it from our side," said Mr. Weaver. "But there are two ways of looking at it; and it seems to me that it is the lad's duty to go back to his own friends. It may be they are now in sore grief about him."

"But he says he will never go back, John. I do not rightly know about it, but there is some matter of pride between them, and he is set not to go back."

"Right is right and wrong is wrong," persisted the sturdy farmer, "and Pride is sometimes a poor adviser. We should have thought it pretty hard if our Dan had wandered away from us to take up with strangers."

The loss of this Dan, their cherished son, had been the one great grief which had cast a shadow upon the life of this worthy couple.

"Dan never could have left us," was

the indignant reply. "He was too good a boy, and he knew too well how much we loved him."

"And how do we know but this young man's people love him just as much?" said the farmer. "Then there is another thing to be thought of: this lad comes of a different stock, some way. I know by all his talk that it would be a sort of coming down in life for him to do just as we do. He ought to go back to his own place, and I shall tell him so." And he kept his word.

But at the first allusion to his future Paul's pride took alarm. "You need not be afraid, Mr. Weaver," he said, haughtily; "I have not the least intention of staying here to be a burden to you. I have already too long trespassed upon your generous hospitality, but I could not very well help myself. You brought me here when I had no choice in the matter."

The farmer looked at him keenly and

reproachfully. He was more and more convinced that Paul came of a good stock. He admired the graceful figure, the well-poised head, the commanding air, but he did not at all admire the spirit which prompted this remark. "Do not scorn the hand that saved you," he said. "If I had not brought you here, where would you now have been?"

"True, where would I have been?" said Paul, sadly. "My doom would have been certain. Yet perhaps it would have been as well to have left me there to perish. There is not much chance for me even now."

"Do not say so. You are young; to me you seem a mere boy. Your future is in your own hands. Go back to your father and mother; ask them to forgive you if you have gone wrong. They will be sure to do it. I know a parent's heart."

"My father and my mother are in heav-

en," said Paul. "Had they lived, I should not be what I am;" and he bowed his head upon the kitchen-table and sobbed aloud.

He looked so like a heartbroken boy that the farmer could hardly restrain his own emotion; but he said, "Well, then go to the big brother and the sister that you talked about so much. I know they are of a good sort. Do not let your pride stand between you and them. Pride goes before destruction. Remember that."

Paul raised his head and dashed away his tears. "I will never go back to them as I am now," he said. "It is not my pride that stands between us, it is my sins. I cannot breathe the same air with them till I have redeemed the past—till I am sure that I can resist temptation."

"What man has not sinned?" said the good farmer; "yet there is forgiveness with God: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteous-

ness.' That is a good saying for us all. If God can forgive us, surely we can forgive one another; and if he can make us clean enough to stand before him, I do not know that any one on earth is too good to put up with our society."

But Paul set his lips very firmly together as he repeated, "I will never go back to disgrace them. When I am sure of myself, perhaps I will; till then I will be as a stranger to them all. I told them that it should be so, and it shall."

Mr. Weaver saw that he was in earnest and that he could not be moved. "Well," he replied, "you know my mind, and you refuse my advice. I do not know all; I do not know even your true name. I gather this much, though, from your own talk: you have fallen from a good place in the world by your own wrong-doing; you might go back to it, and you will not. You are too proud to humble yourself, and you are wrong."

"I am not too proud to humble myself," said Paul, "but I am under the dominion of an evil habit, and I have felt its power even here: I dare not trust myself where I should be more strongly tempted. You do not know my real name, and you shall not know it. My father's name was honored among men, yet I, his own son, have been a drunkard. I have fallen very low, but I will not drag that name through the mire. I will never wear it again till I have conquered myself."

The farmer drew a long breath. "Well, I have said my say," he said, "and now I will tell you my wife's plan: she wants you to stay with us and be our boy. We had a fine boy of our own once—" There was a sudden break in his voice, but he went hurriedly on: "I cannot talk of him much even now. We sent him off to school, and he took kindly to his books, and we were none ashamed of him. Perhaps we were too proud of him: the Lord does not like

to have us make idols of those we love. Be that as it may, the world has never been the same to us since Dan was taken out of it. His mother has never ceased to fret for him, and now her heart has gone out to you. She says that I could give you enough to do about the farm to pay your way and keep you busy; so now I make you the offer. I know it is not the place for you: your ways are not our ways, and you are not rugged enough for farm-work; but if you choose to stay and be steady, I will do the best I can for you. So that is all there is about it."

Paul's eyes lighted up with a sudden joy. "Oh, you good man!" he cried. "If you really need me, I shall be only too glad to stay here. And you shall not be sorry; I will do my very best. No, I am not rugged, but I can do more than you think; I am quite used to farm-work. The happiest days of my life have been spent upon a farm."

"I want to know!" said the farmer, in surprise. "I should have said, now, that those hands had never handled a hoe."

Paul glanced at the white slender hands and held them up before the window, so that the light struck through them. "That shows how much you can tell from appearances," he said: "they have handled a hoe many a time. I was born on a farm. My early home was very much like this, only it was not near the sea."

"I want to know!" said the farmer. "It seems like a sort of beginning life over again; don't it, now?"

"I wish it did," said Paul; "but I can never again be what I was then—an innocent boy."

"You can repent and do right," said the farmer, in an encouraging tone; "that is the next best thing. And if you are so afraid of yourself about the drink, why not take the pledge and make a sure thing of it? We have not many drinking people

in these parts, but there are a few, and you might chance to come across one of them."

"I told you I dare not trust myself," said Paul, "and it would make it no better for me to have a broken pledge to add to my other sins. But I will give my word that while I am in your employ I will never drink a drop of anything that can intoxicate me. I am willing to pledge myself to that extent; for if at any time I find that I am in danger of breaking my word, I will go away."

"And what shall we call you?" said the farmer. "I do not want to press you to tell any secrets; but if you are to stay here, it will come sort of handy for you to have a name to go by. At first I called you 'the tramp,' and then 'the boy,' but you would not want to be known to the people around this neighborhood by either of those titles."

"Call me 'Paul,'" was the reply; "one

name will answer every purpose. I am your hired man, and my name is Paul."

So Mr. Hosmer's fifth son started in life on a new basis and under a new name; for in that part of the country he soon came to be known as Paul Weaver. And he was not unhappy. His wants were all cared for, and he interested himself in his work. His health improved and his youthful spirits returned.

Mr. and Mrs. Weaver loved him, and he was very popular in the neighborhood. He returned their love, and was deeply grateful to them for all that they had done for him.

Yet when the work was all disposed of for the day there were times in which he wandered off by the sea and sat down alone to think. Then he remembered what he might have been; he recalled all that he had enjoyed in his books, in his own family, in congenial, cultured, improving society; and he felt that his sins had

cut him off from these, had cast him down from this better state. Then he felt that his future would be barren and desolate, that his life was one of servitude—in the desert.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT CHARITY HOSMER SEEMED TO BE, AND WHAT SHE WAS.

IF gay society and flattering attentions have power to make a woman happy, Charity Hosmer ought to have been a very happy woman. In the home of her rich sister she was quite removed from all the disagreeable hamperments which had been so trying to her girlhood. She had her duties as housekeeper, it is true, and they were not light, for Mr. Ashton invited a great deal of company to his house and was very particular as to the mode of their entertainment. But, in return for her services, she had a liberal allowance, which enabled her to gratify all her pretty tastes and fancies. She did not find her duties distasteful, either. She had no restrictions

as to expense, had as many good servants as she chose to employ and exercised an absolute authority over them. Being active and energetic, she liked to be employed; and, being a young woman of a very proud, independent spirit, she would have accepted a position in her brother-in-law's house on no other terms than that she should make herself really useful. Then she was growing more fondly attached to Ruth than she had ever supposed she possibly could be. The two sisters had been in childhood rather antagonistic in their natures, and had always contrived to misunderstand each other. Charity's keen eyes were quick to see defects, and her sharp tongue was pretty sure to make the offender aware of the fact. Ruth was selfish and unstable. Charity noted this, and quite ignored her many good qualities. Ruth often made her home uncomfortable, and Charity decided that it was no more than fair that Ruth should be

made uncomfortable in return. So there had been frequent jars between the sisters. Time and change and life's discipline had, however, softened them both. Charity had learned to control herself and to repress her sarcasms, and, with her more prosperous circumstances, Ruth had become less exacting and fretful. The older sister, finding a strength in the younger which she herself lacked, leaned more and more upon it, and the younger loved her the more for this dependence.

So Charity was duly appreciated and much admired. She was pretty enough, though in point of beauty she could not compare with Ruth. But her bright, witty remarks and lively manners were the chief charm. She amused people and kept them awake, and, as a general thing, heartily enjoyed herself.

People said that both Mrs. Ashton and her sprightly sister were lacking in heart, Mrs. Ashton was so frivolous and capricious

and Miss Charity was so sarcastic and cold. Never was a judgment more mistaken. Ruth was not *all* froth: the froth was uppermost; the true, deeper feeling had never yet been fully awakened. When she was a girl she had yielded herself too entirely to every passing impulse to stop to consult her heart; all her thought was for gayety, excitement, amusement—anything to carry her away from herself and out of herself. She had loved her family more from habit and because they loved her than for any other reason. She had come nearer to loving her father with a warm, unselfish love than any other person, and Edward Stanton, her boy-lover, might have won from her a still deeper feeling if circumstances had not thrown their lives too far apart before she had come to herself. She loved her husband well enough to satisfy herself, but there were depths within her nature which had never been sounded, and which she herself did not suspect.

As for Charity, the same concentrated energy which was the mainspring of all her undertakings ruled her affections. She had loved her father with an intensity which no one ever suspected; she would have died for her mother and never have claimed the least credit for her devotion. And now? Well, few now would have suspected the fervor with which that gay girl, with her ready laugh and the jest which too often left a sting behind, could love. She did not seem the same person who had gathered the children about her in the village school and governed them by a word or a glance; she did not seem the same person who had proved to Miss Ellis such a sympathizing companion that that lady considered her not only wise and discreet, but lovable and lovely; she did not seem like the same person who had confessed to Dr. Ellis her secret dissatisfaction with herself and her longing for a better, higher life than she had ever known. Yet she *was* the same;

and, try as she would, and did, to deceive herself, she could not succeed. She knew that God had claims upon her which she refused to acknowledge; she knew that she was daily letting down bars which her father's hand would never have removed. Rules of living which she found plainly written in God's word, which she fully understood and which her own conscience approved, she trampled upon at every turn. In vain did she say to herself, "What matters it? I do not profess to be a Christian." She knew that she ought not only to *profess* to be a Christian, but to *be* one in sincerity and in truth. She was bound to it by her duty to God her Creator; she was bound to it by the vow of consecration with which her parents had placed her in the very bosom of the Church; she was bound to it by her own convictions of truth; she was bound to it by the faint, trembling hope which she had sometimes cherished that she was accepted through Christ.

In vain did she say to herself that she was only putting off this thing for a season, that she could never be a consistent Christian in Mr. Ashton's family, and that when she did set out she meant to be so much in earnest that she would atone for the past. She had been too well instructed in religious truth to deceive herself in this way. She knew that, having once broken God's law, she was liable to the full penalty of such transgression—that even if she could begin at that time to lead a perfect life, there was no atonement possible for her except that which had been wrought out for her by her glorious Saviour; she knew that she added to her guilt every day and hour that she refused to bow down before him; she knew that the call to her was to come *now*, and that she could be sure of no other season; that her only duty was to *obey*, and that grace and strength would be given her. She also knew that she was no such weak creature as she would fain

have made herself out to be; she knew that she had not the least fear of Mr. Ashton, that man of iron will; she knew that she could give him sarcasm for sarcasm, and that even in pretending to obey his most unreasonable demands she could make him thoroughly uncomfortable; she knew that were she to perform her own duty she might perhaps help Ruth to come to a better understanding of hers, for Ruth was beginning to be influenced by her just in proportion to her dependence upon her.

But Charity knew that she was not ready to give up the world; in her heart she clung to it more and more. She was frightened at its increasing power over her. Its vanities and pleasures absorbed much more of her time and her thoughts than they had done at first. Then they had given her only a sensation of surprise mingled with curiosity, and a sort of half-amused contempt that grown-up men and women could really care for the trifles to which they seem-

ed to attach so much importance; then, in a half-sportive vein, she had entered into competition for some of the prizes herself; but now she found herself grown really interested in things to which once she would have given hardly a passing thought.

In her heart Charity despised herself. She would often stand and gaze at herself, as she was fully reflected in the mirror, looking like some gay bird in its most brilliant plumage. She would see that the dress and the figure were at their best; she would think of the ball where she purposed to dance half the night, of the partners to whom she had promised her hand, of the inevitable subjects of their conversation; and a peculiar smile would just curve the corners of her mouth as she said to herself, "How fine you are, Charity Hosmer! and yet, after all, what do you amount to? What a noble woman you are, to be sure! And how much good you are doing in the world!" Then she would rush off to the

exciting scene, get rid of all serious thoughts, and proclaim to Ruth that she had perfectly enjoyed herself.

Not for the world would she have owned the truth either to herself or to Ruth, but she was a disappointed woman—one who had to keep up her spirits by every means that she could contrive in order to prevent her heart from breaking, for that heart was ever turning back to the home which she had found after her mother's death, and which she had learned to love—where she could daily enjoy the congenial society of Dr. Ellis and his sister, and could be both useful and happy. She was astonished, provoked and ashamed to find that this yearning increased rather than diminished; that often in her dreams she heard the tones of a voice which she feared she nevermore should listen to on earth; that often a face would come before her which she would have been glad to forget. She knew that never again should she have

a friend like Dr. Ellis—so grand, so noble, so good. She wondered that he could ever have even seemed to care for a silly child like her; she did not at all resent it that he had so soon ceased to care. In his pity and unselfish kindness he had interested himself in her at a time when she was poor and friendless; he had found a teacher's place for her when she had told him how anxious she was to earn money in order to help her mother. When her mother had been sad and lonely, he had done all that he could to cheer her; and when her mother had died, how delicately he had made it appear that Miss Jane Ellis was in need of a young companion, and so had found a home for her in his own house! She had not understood at the time that it was only from pity that he did all this; if she had, her pride would not have allowed her to accept his kind offer. She had thought that he really liked her, that he enjoyed her

society, and that it gave him pleasure to talk with her; and, so thinking, she had allowed herself to think of him, to care for him, to try to please him, till he had become to her more dear than any other friend had ever been. It had been a mistake on her part; she had only herself to blame. She could have smiled at her own folly, willfulness and self-conceit, only that it had caused her such keen pain. She had never even guessed at the truth till Ruth had told her how absurd it was to suppose that either Dr. Ellis or his sister could really wish her to live with them if she could be as well provided for elsewhere. When she had acted on this suggestion and proposed to make a home for herself with Ruth, she had almost hoped that they would oppose the plan. Their ready acquiescence in it, and the manner in which they had suffered her to drop out of their lives since then, had convinced her that Ruth was right. This was mor-

tifying; it had deeply humbled her. If she stopped to think about it, she was sure that her heart would break. Her only consolation was that no one could ever know, that neither Ruth nor Patience had guessed her secret. So she was restless and flippant and sarcastic by turns; she rushed hither and thither in a sort of wild excitement; she made Mr. Ashton laugh by her spirited witticisms; she cheered Ruth, petted, helped and flattered her.

People said that Charity Hosmer knew not a want nor a care—that she was like a humming-bird in a garden of roses. She alone knew that if she had been more happy she would have been less gay; that the roses were artificial and unsatisfactory; that she was passing through the desert with weary feet and an aching heart; yet that she would not even try to enter the promised land, because of doubts, of fears and of inward reluctance which she could not conquer.

CHAPTER X.

FOUND OUT.

"WHERE are you going, Essie?" said Mrs. Bayard as the young girl came tripping lightly down the stairs all dressed for going out.

Esther started; she had not expected to meet her adopted mother just then. She had supposed that the errand which had taken her from the house that morning would have detained her longer. "Oh, mamma, I did not know you were at home," she said, adroitly evading a reply. "You are so apt to stay away hours and hours when you go on a shopping-expedition."

Mrs. Bayard's attention was easily diverted in this way, and Esther knew it. Since Patience had gone to live with Jo-

seph the lively school-girl had managed to have her own way in almost everything. This freedom from restraint had not been at all good for her. Her faults, which might have been checked by firm, wise discipline, were growing; her virtues, which might have been nurtured had it not been for the weeds which choked them, were on the wane.

Patience would at once have noticed the girl's guilty start and conscious blush, and would have demanded an answer to her question. Much as she loved her young sister, she never suffered herself to be deceived by her. It was different with Mrs. Bayard. Keen and quick to detect the least flaw in others, where this child of her adoption was concerned she was blind. There were two reasons for this, both of which were based upon weaknesses of the lady's own character. She was always partial in her judgment of those whom she loved, and she was such

a keen lover of the beautiful that she could hardly ever resist the charm of beauty and grace combined.

Esther Hosmer was well aware of both these weaknesses, and did not hesitate to avail herself of them. She had thrown herself, weeping, into the arms of her much-tried sister when she found that she was really to be deprived of her care, and had made quite a pretty display of sensibility. She had been sincere in this lament at the parting, because she had both an affectionate and a jealous disposition. She did truly love Patience, and she was jealous of the little Philip, whom she regarded as a rival. But afterward she had been rather glad to escape from the clear eyes which were always so true, and the calm rebuke which was never unreasonable. "I can twist mamma about my finger," she boastfully said to one of her schoolmates. "She thinks I am about perfect."

"How do you manage it?" said the girl, laughing. "My mamma is more clear-sighted. I stand a better chance to get around papa."

"Oh, I take care to look as pretty as I can when I ask a favor of her, and I kiss her first and tell her how much I love her; and then she will let me do almost anything," said Esther.

On this particular morning Esther would have been glad not to have been questioned, for she was about to do something which Mrs. Bayard had positively forbidden; so she not only evaded the answer, but she assumed to be greatly interested in the result of the shopping-expedition, and asked so many natural questions that Mrs. Bayard quite forgot to renew the inquiry.

Esther was also looking very pretty. Her golden curls and fair complexion contrasted beautifully with her black velvet hat and sack, and with the long black feather which drooped so low as almost to rest upon them.

As she poised herself lightly on the stairs, with one little gloved hand resting upon the dark banister and with that happy light in her blue eyes, Mrs. Bayard forgot everything except that she was her child and the most charming little creature under the sun.

She passed her arm about her and kissed her. "Oh, Essie," she said, "I love you very dearly."

The girl laughed and laid one little kiss on each cheek of the pale face which was turned up to hers as the elder lady stood beneath her on the stairs. "And I love you, mamma," she said, in her clear, sweet voice. "You are always so good to me!"

Then, before anything more could be said, she hurried away; and it was not till the street door had closed that Mrs. Bayard remembered that Esther had not told her where she was going to spend her morning. "Patience would blame me if she were here," she said to herself; "I do not look after the child as she would. But

what does it matter, after all? Essie is an artless little girl, and I have confidence in her. I cannot love where I cannot trust."

Yes, here was another strong trait in this lady's character. Like most people who are apt to be governed by partiality, she thought the one whom she loved could never do wrong; but it was too apt to be the case that the one who did not please her could, in her estimation, never do right. The four sisters in the Hosmer family were ranked on the two sides of the dividing-line, Patience and Esther on the one side, Ruth and Charity on the other. Long ago the latter two had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Ruth had been pronounced selfish and exacting; Charity, sarcastic and ill-tempered; and no changes which fortune or misfortune could work in either of them would induce Mrs. Bayard to like them.

Even as she was thinking about Esther the "artless child" was laughing and talk-

ing with a tall girl who had joined her at the corner of the street. "Oh, Emma," she was saying, "I was so afraid that I could not come: mamma met me in the hall and began to ask questions. I knew, if I mentioned your name, all would be over, for she has forbidden me even to speak to you. I cannot think what has set her so against you. The only time she was ever cross to me was once when she suspected that I had deceived her about you."

Emma Lansing was a bold, haughty girl whose family were not at all to be respected on account of either their manners or their morals. They had plenty of money, but made no good use of it. Emma had been subjected to no restraint, and had, in some fashion, educated herself. She had become acquainted with Esther at school, and had taken a violent fancy to her. Being older and having a strong will, she had gained such an influence over her that she could persuade her to do almost anything.

Patience had discovered that this influence was doing her young sister a great deal of harm, and had tried to break up an intimacy which she could not approve. Esther was inclined to rebel against her sister's authority, but Mrs. Bayard had come to the rescue, and had forbidden all future intercourse between the girls. "I have inquired about these people, Essie," she said, "and I do not approve of them."

Esther had said no more; she knew Mrs. Bayard too well to defy her authority. She pouted a little, protested a little, and then seemed to yield; but she had never meant to obey. The intimacy had not ceased, and since Patience had left them it had been easily kept up. Esther had resorted to artifice, equivocation, and even to actual falsehood, in devising excuses to be with Emma; while Mrs. Bayard had almost forgotten that there was such a person in the world.

As Emma heard her friend's not very

complimentary remark she tossed her head scornfully. "Mrs. Bayard's opinion of me is of no account so long as it does not keep you away from me," she said. "I shall never seek her company or ask any favors from her. You have come to me, you darling! in spite of her, and I am sure of you for the whole day; so it is all right."

"I do not know what would happen if mamma should find it out," said Esther.

"Nothing very dreadful, I suppose," said Emma. "What a timid little goose you are, my dear! She could not beat or starve you or shut you up in a dark closet to punish you; and I think you are too old to tremble at the idea of a scolding."

"I do not know what she would do," said Esther, with a nervous shiver; "do not let us talk about it. If she had looked at my face when she first spoke to me this morning, she must have suspected something. As it is, I do not know but I had better go back, though she has promised to dine with

her brother, and I shall have a fearfully stupid day."

"You shall do no such thing," said Emma; "I will not allow it. You have made an engagement to dine with me, and I have invited a few friends to meet you; and mamma and papa have promised that they will not appear upon the scene at all; so that we shall have great fun."

"Yes, it will be great fun," echoed Esther, with a merry laugh. "I suppose you have invited Isabel and Emergene and Marian?"

"Of course; and Marian's young man to play the devoted to her, and Mr. Spencer to entertain Isabel, and Percy Armstrong for Emergene. As for you, my brother Herbert will claim you, as he always does; he positively raves about you. It really would not do to repeat to you all the compliments he pays you."

Esther blushed and turned away her face. "You ought not to say such things to me, Emma," she said; "mamma would

be so angry! She says I am too young to go into society and be introduced to gentlemen."

"Nonsense, my dear!" said Emma. "You are not so very young. There is Marian, who is just your age, and she is engaged to be married. Your mamma will have to shut you up in sober earnest if she wishes to keep people from admiring you. Herbert says that your beauty is of a very rare kind, and that if you only had a little more dash about you there would be no resisting you. And Herbert knows; he has been abroad, and has very high notions, I can assure you."

Again Esther blushed, but she laughed and looked well pleased. "I never know what to say to your brother," she said; "he is so much older than I am, and has seen so much more of the world."

"Oh, just rattle on and say anything that comes into your head," said Emma; "that is the way I do. Anything is better

than to be dull and shy; gentlemen hate that. They soon get tired of a girl who does not talk, no matter how pretty she is."

We can see from this just how this friendship was calculated to work harm to Esther. Emma flattered her, prompted her to disobedience and deceit in order to introduce her into society which Mrs. Bayard did not approve, and laughed at all those sweet instincts of modesty and timidity which were Esther's principal charm.

It may be wondered at that a girl of this character could interest one who was of so opposite a nature, but it had all come about quite naturally. Emma's dash, spirit, rich dress and unlimited command of money had made her a ruling favorite at school. The teachers had winked at her follies rather than risk the loss of a pupil who paid so well; the scholars had been flattered by her notice, and had glad-

ly followed her lead in all the schemes for fun and frolic which her brain was so fertile in devising. When she chose Esther as her particular friend, the younger and more timid girl was proud of the distinction. Being of an affectionate disposition, her heart was easily won, and, having no knowledge of society except as it affected her school-life, she was not very discriminating.

Emma was generous, good-tempered and fervent in expressions of affection; Esther believed in her, and was fascinated by her. She strove to imitate her, and, not being so daring or so unrestrained at home, became deceitful in order to secure forbidden pleasures. When Mrs. Bayard and Patience commanded her to give up this friendship altogether, both her willfulness and her love for Emma prompted her to resort to any artifice rather than to obey.

The romantic tinge which was given to this intercourse added to its charm. If

Esther had stopped to think, she would have been shocked at the part she was playing; she would have seen herself to be both ungrateful and wicked. But Esther seldom did think very deeply in those days. According to Emma's code, parents and guardians were prosy and stupid, convenient to resort to when one wanted anything, but hardly to be tolerated when the occasion had gone by. Their notions were old-fashioned and absurd, and no young person of any spirit would be guided by them. This being the case, there was nothing left for young people of sense or wit who were hedged in by any such notions, except to get around them, leap over them or break them down. So Esther suffered herself to be led away, and had gone very far astray.

On this particular morning she had ventured on a bold stroke. She knew that Mrs. Bayard had engagements for the day which would leave her free to follow her own devices, and Emma had found it out,

and had planned a special frolic for a few choice spirits like herself.

A new and dangerous element had lately mingled with this friendship. Herbert Lansing had returned from Europe, and was doing his best to establish an intimacy with the little beauty who seemed so artless and was reputed to be a great heiress. This Herbert was a fascinating young gentleman with a handsome person and polished manners. He knew very well how to make himself agreeable to ladies, but he was not a desirable acquaintance for any lady to have: he was thoroughly unprincipled, and his past life would not bear inspection. He well knew how to adapt himself to any company in which he found himself, and thus his real character was seldom suspected. In the eyes of a simple school-girl like Esther he was a perfect hero of romance, and she was much flattered by his attentions. Had he really won her heart, her whole life would have been made unhap-

py, but God did not permit this cruel fate to befall her. This dinner-company was to be the last stolen pleasure of the kind which was to be permitted to her.

It was a gay company; not one of the young persons who composed it would have been approved of by Mrs. Bayard. They were all assembled in a large drawing-room just before dinner was announced, and were very merry. No older person was present, and there was much talk of which no older person would have approved. A style of slang and romping familiarity had been established which was new to Esther, but her high spirits had so carried her away that she entered fully into the enjoyment of the occasion.

Just beyond the drawing-room there was a smaller room which was used as a library. The door of entrance stood open and the room was supposed to be unoccupied, but just as the revel was at its height a gentleman came out, spoke a moment to Emma

Lansing and passed quietly through into the hall. He was a tall, dignified man with a very grave demeanor. Esther was so much engrossed by a sort of half-flirtation with Herbert Lansing that she did not notice his approach till he was close beside her. This couple were seated on a sofa quite remote from the rest of the company. She turned her head at the sound of an approaching footstep, and checked herself in the midst of a very silly speech as she met the glance of surprise and disgust which the stranger bestowed upon her in passing. That glance brought her to herself and made her very uncomfortable. Her face flushed deeply, and she suddenly became silent.

Herbert laughed. "That is some one who came to see the governor on a matter of business," he said. "It was very stupid in the servant to show him into that room. I hope he has been edified by what he saw and heard while here."

"I do hope he did not hear what I said,"

replied Esther, in a distressed voice. "What must he think of me?"

"I am sure you did not say anything that was so very dreadful," said Herbert. "Besides, why should you care? It is not at all likely that you will ever again see his face."

Esther suffered herself to be comforted, but she could not regain her composure, and was really glad when the time came for her to go home.

Herbert did not suffer her to depart till he had extorted from her a promise that she would walk on the avenue on the following day. She could not resist his persuasions, although she was sorry as soon as she had yielded to them. "I do not know where this will end," she thought to herself. "I almost wish I had never begun it."

The end was close at hand.

The next morning, as she was practicing her music-lesson, a gentleman was shown into the parlor. Mrs. Bayard was glancing over a new book, but she quickly threw it

down as she caught a sight of the gentleman's face. "Mr. Morton!" she said. "How glad I am to see you!"

Esther sprang to her feet and turned just in time to see that Mr. Morton was no other than the stranger whose appearance in Mr. Lansing's drawing-room on the day before had so annoyed her. She hoped to escape through a side door without attracting his attention, but Mrs. Bayard laid her hand upon her arm. "Stay, my dear," she said. "This is an old friend of mine.—Mr. Morton, let me introduce you to my daughter."

"I am very glad to meet your daughter again," said Mr. Morton, kindly, as he took Esther's reluctant hand in his. "I longed to speak a word of warning to her yesterday, when I did not know even her name."

"'Again'? 'Yesterday'?" said Mrs. Bayard. "Pray explain yourself; you are talking in riddles."

"My riddle is easily solved," said Mr. Mor-

ton. "I have had business dealings with Mr. Lansing lately, and chanced to be at his house yesterday when Miss Emma was entertaining her young dinner-company. I hope you will excuse me for saying that I was sorry to see your daughter among the guests. She was a stranger to me, but I knew at once that she was different from the others, and I could not bear to see her in the society of Herbert Lansing. I know more of that young man's doings than he thinks I do, and I believe him to be thoroughly corrupt. Perhaps I am too blunt in saying this to you, but I cannot refrain from speaking the truth to so old a friend. I have had better opportunities of knowing the character of these Lansings than you possibly could have, and I would not allow my own daughter even to know them."

Mrs. Bayard turned upon Esther a withering glance. It went to her very heart. She blushed deeply and left the room without one word of explanation or apology. It

was useless to attempt either. Her sin had found her out.

Mr. Morton saw her distress and confusion, but wholly mistook the cause. "I hope I have not hurt your daughter?" he said. "She seemed to me such a mere child that I never thought her heart might be interested in this young man. Even if it should be so, it is better for her to know the truth; but I ought not to have been so abrupt in telling it."

Mrs. Bayard attempted to pass the affair off lightly. It was no part of her plan to expose Esther's faults to another; so she merely said, "I thank you very much for what you have said. You only confirm my own suspicions in regard to this family, but Miss Emma was a school-friend of Esther's, and such intimacies are hard to break up. This Herbert is a very recent acquaintance; I have not even seen him."

Another topic of conversation was introduced, and Mr. Morton never knew what a

violent blow he had given to the domestic happiness of his old friend.

Esther, in the mean time, sat in her own room awaiting his departure. She fairly trembled with apprehension of she knew not what. That look had been terrible to her in its disgust, amazement and silent reproach. Once or twice she had seen a certain cold displeasure in Mrs. Bayard's face when she had been in the act of dismissing a servant who had deceived her, but never a look like that. Her sensitive nature quivered under the very remembrance, and she began to see her own conduct in its true light.

That was the worst of it: she had not a single word to say in extenuation or excuse. She had chosen to disobey her mother; she had chosen to deceive her in order to screen her disobedience; and she had done so over and over again. She had not even repented of it and confessed it, but she had been found out in it; and she well knew that if

she had not been thus found out she should have gone on in this same course to the end.

She heard the street door open and shut; then she heard Mrs. Bayard's step ascending the stairs. The door opened. She could not look up. She covered her face with her hands and bowed her head as if a weight were resting upon it. It was the weight of conscious guilt.

Truly, the way of transgressors is hard. Here was one of the fairest of God's creatures—so beautiful as to be able to draw hearts to herself even by a look. She was dressed in the most dainty fashion; she was in a room that was daintily furnished; the sunlight streamed in upon a face that might have been the face of an angel; everywhere about her were the evidences of God's love, and of an earthly love which thought nothing too good for her use; yet in that moment, though alone in the presence of God and of her dearest earthly friend, she did not dare

to lift her head. Convicted by her own conscience, she felt as if she would be glad to sink through the floor, if only she might thus escape from this crisis to which her sins had brought her.

"Esther Hosmer," said Mrs. Bayard, "if you *can* speak the truth, I wish you would do it now. Were you indeed present at Emma Lansing's dinner-company yesterday?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Have you continued an intimacy with that girl contrary to my express commands?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Have you been in the habit of going to her house when I have supposed you to be with friends of whom I could approve?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Have you accepted the attentions of Mr. Herbert Lansing and allowed him to see that they gave you pleasure?"

"Yes, mamma."

No tones of the human voice could have been more icily cold than were those in which Mrs. Bayard asked these questions, and every answer which Esther gave was accompanied by a heartbroken little sob.

"It is enough," said Mrs. Bayard; "now I know you as you are. I will speak to you again when I have well considered my own duty in this matter; till then I leave you to your own reflections."

She was about to leave the room, but Esther sprang up and placed herself against the door. "Mamma," she cried, "oh, mamma, do not leave me in this way! You will break my heart!"

Once the traces of tears on that lovely face would have called forth the most tender expressions of love and sympathy from Mrs. Bayard; now she looked upon them without emotion. "It is *you* who have broken *my* heart," she said, in the same constrained tone. "I have loved and trusted

you entirely, and you have been false from the first to the last."

"You are cruel to me, mamma—too cruel!" pleaded Esther. "Do you, then, cast me off for one fault? Will you never love me any more?"

"I do not cast you off," said Mrs. Bayard. "You have placed a gulf between us which I cannot bridge over; you have deceived me. I have believed you to be good and true; until now I have never really known you."

"You are so harsh, so stern!" said Esther. "You will not hear me."

"Have you anything to say in your own defence, then?" was the reply.

"Nothing," said Esther. "But oh, mamma, can you not forgive me? Can you not love me once more?"

Mrs. Bayard began to tremble in her turn. The firm lips quivered with an emotion which she could not control. She caught the girl in her arms and pressed

one kiss upon her forehead. "I forgive you," she said, impulsively, "because it is my Christian duty; I will not cast you off, because I promised your mother that I would care for you always; I love you, because I cannot help it; but I do not feel as if I could ever trust you again." She turned and left the room.

Esther cast herself upon the bed in an agony of grief. With the rash abandonment of youth, she decided that for her all happiness had ended. She closed her eyes to all the beauties around her and wished that she might die.

But then she did not dare to think of death. If it had been so terrible to hear Mrs. Bayard pronounce her judgment, what would it be to go into the immediate presence of God with such a sin upon her soul? No, she was not prepared to die. She must just live on, and no one would really care for her any more. So she sobbed herself to sleep.

What a pity she had not remembered that God never spurns the soul that cries out to him for help! If she had only uttered that prayer to him, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" she would have been pardoned, comforted and restored to favor. But just then she had no unhappiness on account of the separation of her soul from God. That thought made her fear to die, but she could live quite well without holding any communion with him. She wanted to be petted, to be loved, to be trusted, by Mrs. Bayard; for the rest she did not care. Yet her earthly friend had proved harsh and unforgiving; while Jesus, the gracious Saviour, had drawn nearer to her in her trouble, had read the secrets of her guilty soul with a pitying eye, and had in his loving heart rich purposes of mercy which he could not then unfold to her because she was not ready to receive them.

CHAPTER XI.

A BIRTH AND A DEATH.

MRS. ASHTON was once more a very happy woman. She had found that the rainbow-tints of her early married life could fade; that her still earlier dreams of bliss had been but transient; that even her own conduct all through was a disappointment to her. But a new experience had come to her, and had brought with it a new hope, a new aim, a new joy. God had given to her a little daughter, and at the first touch of that baby-hand a new nature seemed to awaken within her. The self-love, the vanity, the worldliness, seemed to recede, and all the better impulses which had been so long buried were suddenly revealed.

Delicate health, which had at first given

to her beauty a fragile character that but enhanced its charm, began to tell unfavorably upon her appearance; she hardly took notice of the fact. Gay friends who at first were most assiduous in their attentions grew more and more neglectful; if she noticed their desertion, it was with a sensation of relief rather than of regret. Her thoughts, her love, her time, were all given to her child. She would sit with her baby in her arms, its tiny hand clasped in hers, gazing into its sweet unconscious face and dreaming of its future; and, sitting thus, though her face had lost its bloom, it wore an expression which it had never before worn. There was the soul-light in the tender smile, the soul-life was shining through the mother's eyes.

All these years through her wanderings and discontent her loving Father had held her thus, waiting for his child to look up into his face and to seek to know him better; now the hour had come. This

little one was to be trained for heaven; the immortal soul was to be cared for, as well as the mortal body. She could not depend upon Mr. Ashton for help in this work; she clearly saw now that his theories would not stand the tests of time or of eternity. To her alone had this trust been committed; she, who had proved so unworthy, who had so failed to govern herself, had this responsibility given to her. What if, through any lack in her, this precious child should miss of heaven? The very thought was unendurable. From the depths of an earnest soul she sent up the prayer, "O God, forgive me! pity me! strengthen me! help me!"

And He who had been waiting and watching and loving—did he not hear? Ah, yes! Hardly had the desire been formed in the mind ere the gracious answer was on its way. More and more clearly was it given to Ruth to distinguish realities from shams. She began

to see new beauty in spiritual things; seeing, to desire; desiring, to seek; seeking, to find; finding, to love; loving, to enjoy them. She had felt a thrill of this joy when first she gave herself to Christ in the little village church, but her own worldliness had so nearly killed it that its coming back to her was like a resurrection. Now she understood why her father and Patience had so loved God's word and had taken such delight in prayer. Oh how much she had missed in being so blind and so wicked as never before to care to understand!

She tried to express some of this to Charity, but Charity always turned away and refused to listen. Charity really wished to find the world satisfying in those days. She well knew that it was not, and never could be; but all the more closely did she cling to it. The spell was upon her, the false light dazzled her. She had determined that she would not yet

give it up. All her life she had craved amusement; it had hitherto been denied to her. Now that it had come in her way, she meant to have it at any cost. She was really glad that in her moments of conviction and longing after better things she had bound herself by no vows of consecration. If she had done so, those vows would have held her; now she believed herself to be free to act her own pleasure, or rather she pretended so to believe. Not to the extent of finally rejecting Christ; she never meant to do that. She meant only to put off the day when she should wholly give herself up to him in a consistent Christian life.

It was well for Ruth that her baby's birth had brought to her this new joy, for it was also to be the occasion of many disappointments and sorrows. At first she had hardly noticed that as Mr. Ashton slipped back into the old ruts she gradually became less necessary to him and he grew

less tender in his love for her. But the time came when this became so marked that she could not help seeing. No woman likes to be neglected by her husband, and Ruth was one who had always fancied that she could not live without both love and admiration; so she mourned in secret and strove by many little affectionate devices to regain that which she had lost. She had partly succeeded when the little daughter came. Mr. Ashton was very proud of the child, and became more devoted in his attentions to the mother than he had for some time been. Ruth was very happy and thought that this happiness would last, but soon differences began to arise between the husband and the wife which threw them farther apart than they had ever been. The differences were on account of the child.

Mr. Ashton was arbitrary in his opinions and decisions. Ruth had always yielded to them where she alone was concerned,

but where her sweet little Lilian was concerned she could not always yield. From the first the services of a good nurse had been secured, but Ruth was prompted by both duty and inclination to give her personal supervision to the management of her nursery.

So long as she was too weak to mingle in society Mr. Ashton did not object to this; but when she had fully regained her strength he commanded her to return to the gay world. "People are beginning to talk about you in a way that I do not like, Ruth," he said. "They say that you are singular, eccentric and romantic. I wish you to accompany me to-morrow night to Mrs. Gardiner's ball. I am tired of going about alone, with an apology for your non-appearance for ever on my lips."

"Pray excuse me, Mr. Ashton," pleaded Ruth. "I really have nothing suitable to wear on such an occasion; and if I had, I

should not be willing to leave the baby for so many hours."

"Nonsense!" was the reply. "You have plenty of dresses that will do well enough. And, as to the baby, I thought you had a nurse whose special business it was to attend to her?"

"You do not understand," said Ruth. "If the child wakes from her first sleep and misses me, she will be sure to cry; and the nurse may not be able to quiet her."

"The woman is hired for the express purpose of taking care of the child, and she ought to do it," said Mr. Ashton. "Besides, it does not hurt a healthy baby to cry a little. She has got to learn to do without you, and she might as well begin now."

"But I never wish to have her learn to do without me," said Ruth. "She shall be my first care now and always."

"That sounds very devoted," said Mr.

Ashton, "but I fancy that I have something to say upon the subject, and I have decided that I will no longer permit you to seclude yourself from the society you are so well fitted to adorn. You are losing your bloom; you are losing your spirits; you are not the same woman that you were when I married you."

"I wish to be a wiser and a better woman," said Ruth, timidly. "I fear that I have been a very inconsistent Christian."

"Oh, pray do not veil your obstinacy under the cloak of religion," said Mr. Ashton, with a sneer. "If it were not for your excessive devotion to that child, I fancy your religious scruples would not have oppressed you. You must accompany me to this ball. I insist upon it."

This was but the beginning. The husband demanded of her one course of action; her duty as a Christian and a mother prompted her to quite the opposite course.

It was a bitter struggle and very wearing.

Then another point came up. Ruth desired—oh how earnestly!—to present her child for baptism.

Mr. Ashton laughed at the idea. "It is simply absurd," he said. "I will never give my consent to it."

"I wish to set the seal of the covenant upon my little Lilian," pleaded Ruth. "I wish to give her up to God, as I mean to train her for his service."

"And I do not wish *my* daughter to be made the subject of any such superstitious custom," said Mr. Ashton. "As to her training, that will be suited to her position in society."

"You promised that you would never interfere with my religious convictions," said Ruth, with a quiver in her voice.

"And I have kept my word," was the cold reply. "So long as you were well and inclined to be reasonable, I never

said a word to you upon the subject; you were well and gay and quite as much inclined to enjoy yourself as I was. Now, because you have suffered yourself to grow morbid, you persuade yourself that you are called upon to make a martyr of yourself for conscience' sake. This I will not permit; neither will I permit my daughter to be restrained in any of the tastes that are suited to her station. Do you understand me?"

Ruth felt weak and nervous. Her only response was an outburst of bitter weeping. It was the worst course that she could have taken to secure the result she so much desired.

Mr. Ashton hated scenes, as he called them, and any unusual display of emotion served only to irritate him. When Ruth was a pretty bride, he had simply endured her in these moods; now he grew angry at the sight of her tears. "If religion is going to make you act like this, madam,"

he said, "I will take you where you will never hear it spoken of."

He went out and closed the door with such violence as to startle the baby and set her to screaming as loud as she could. It was the first time that he had exhibited his temper to Ruth; it was not to be the last. When a thing of this kind has been done once, it is easy to do it again.

There was a reason now for his ill-temper which he was too proud to confess, and which no one suspected. He was of a jealous disposition and very exacting. When he had married Ruth, he had felt that it was an act of great condescension—that it was an act for which a poor girl in her position ought to be eternally grateful; he had felt that he had a right to expect the most devoted love in return. But now he saw her lavish upon her baby a tenderness of which he had never believed her nature capable; he saw his own claims set aside and dis-

regarded, his society neglected, his tastes forgotten, and all for the sake of a little senseless baby who could just as well have been attended to by a hired nurse. The romantic fervor of his love had gone, but he still loved his wife enough to miss her attentions and to feel a bitter sense of injustice that they had been withdrawn. His manner became every day more reserved and his tones more sarcastic. Thus the babe who ought to have been in the house as a "wellspring of joy," became a fountain of discontent. Pretty little unconscious Lilian, lying in her elegant crib, all decked with lace and fine embroidered robes, and smiling up in the faces of both of her parents, was every day driving them farther apart.

Ruth was now beginning to feel the bitterness of this ill-assorted union. So long as the froth obscured her better nature it had worked well enough. She had been content with the friendly regard which

craved only self-indulgence and was founded in neither love nor esteem; now she began to care for her husband's soul, to have a sense of her responsibility to him, to desire to help him upward and onward. But the more she tried to please him, the harder he was to please. It had amused him to humor the whims of the spoiled beauty, but he resented any attempts of the woman to influence him by appeals to his reason and common sense.

Charity guessed at the truth, though both the husband and the wife took some pains to conceal it from her. She was not deceived by the studied politeness of Mr. Ashton's manner nor by Ruth's fitful attempts at gayety. She often surprised her sister in tears, and noticed that her husband spent more of his time away from home than ever before; but she said nothing. To her Mr. Ashton was always the polite gentleman, and, though she knew him to be in the wrong in his treatment

of Ruth, she was willing to suppose that there might be faults on both sides.

But this evil was destined to grow till it quite destroyed every semblance of happiness in the home.

Mr. Ashton had never known what it is to lack a plentiful supply of money; a luxurious style of living had become almost necessary to him through the force of habit. To gratify every taste, to surround himself with objects of beauty, to sit down to a table supplied with every dainty that the market could afford, to entertain his friends in the best possible manner, seemed to him a mere matter of course. It was impossible for him to accept of life on any other terms. A homely object was a perpetual offence to him; a discomfort, let it be ever so trifling, was impossible to be endured.

Ruth liked all this very well; it quite accorded with her own views. She had no care about it: Charity looked out for that.

There was no lack of money. Mr. Ashton was willing that his wife should spend it quite as freely as he himself did. But every one is liable to reverses of fortune, and Mr. Ashton was to be no exception to the general rule. He had speculated largely in a scheme for increasing his fortunes which promised well; the result was failure and loss. It was a heavy blow to him. It was not ruin; it was not even poverty. There was enough left; he was still a rich man. But he had received a shock: that which had happened once might happen again. The fear of poverty began to haunt him. He grumbled when his bills came in; he said that there must be retrenchment in the family expenses.

Charity fixed her mind upon the subject. She sympathized with him and determined to help him. She well knew how to economize; many a hard lesson had taught her the art of getting the largest amount of comfort out of the least expenditure of

money. She was paying high wages to a large number of servants: she hired some who would do the work for less wages. Of course they were not so well trained, but she determined to put up with that; so did Ruth. Mr. Ashton was the one who grumbled; every trifling omission was noticed and commented upon.

At last he uttered a passionate protest: "I cannot stand this. I am not well served. I am convinced that there is no economy in employing servants who do not understand their work."

Then Charity tried to lessen the table expenses, but with no better result. Then Ruth began to dress more economically, but here there was a bitter outcry. In short, the demand was for everything to be kept up on the old scale without much expenditure of money. Nothing can be more wearing. Every demand for money was met with a growl; every bill was the occasion of grumbling; and the frequent and

bitter sarcasms upon the extravagance of women were hardly to be endured.

Charity was made uncomfortable by it, but she met the crisis with her usual weapons—defiance and sarcasm. She did not take the matter sorely to heart, and often had the pleasure of seeing her ungenerous foe quail before one of her well-aimed retorts and blush for very shame.

But Ruth was sensitive to praise or to blame; she was struggling to do right, and this man was her husband, whom she was pledged to love, to honor and to obey. Obey him she did, honor him she could not; and it was with a sense of self-condemnation and horror that she found the friendly feeling which had stood in the place of love changing into positive dislike. She prayed not to feel so; she tried not to admit it even to herself; but she began to listen with dread for the echo of his step, to tremble at the sound of his voice. He saw this, and felt it. The result was that he lingered long

at his dinner-table and took more wine than was good for him.

Coming into the parlor one evening after such an indulgence, he swore at both the sisters. He reproached Ruth for being such a baby that she could not govern her own house, and he told Charity that she was a bother and an expense to him, and that if she had had any sense she would have seen for herself that she was no longer wanted in his house.

Charity sprang to her feet with such a flash in her eyes that he turned away and stumbled out of the room. Then, for the first time, she spoke on the subject to Ruth. "You see how it is, dear," she said. "This house can no longer be my home. I *must* leave it."

"Thank Heaven that you *can* leave it," cried Ruth, with a burst of her former impetuosity; and then she gave way to such bitter grief that Charity was frightened.

Ruth had chosen this man to be her

husband, and it was her sad duty to remain and make the best of him. She could repent, she could amend; but she could not recall that one false step. Truly, the way of transgressors is hard. She, whose father had been so noble, whose merry brothers had never been allowed to be rough in her presence, would have to endure the company of this man, who was selfish, unreasonable and unprincipled, who could drink too much wine and swear at his wife with oaths by a God whose existence he denied. For herself she could endure it; but how would it be for her child? Even now he often grew very impatient with little Lilian: how would it be when she became older? Could it be that he would ever swear at *her?* Thinking thus, her tears fell fast upon her baby's face; but the little creature only laughed and caught one shining tress of her mother's hair in her plump, soft hand. Life was all a joy to her; she knew not that it was

a baptism of grief which she had received because of possibilities which might make her unhappy in the future.

The sisters had a long talk that evening. Charity inclined to take the place of Patience with Joseph, and thus leave Patience free to go back to Mrs. Bayard and Esther. Ruth doubted whether Joseph would give Patience up; she was afraid that Charity and Ella would not agree, and that little Philip would not thrive so well with her. It was an anxious time for them both.

Mr. Ashton did not come in till a late hour. When he did come, he went to his room without entering the parlor.

The parties met at the breakfast-table and were uncommonly ceremonious in their politeness. In his sober senses Mr. Ashton was ashamed of his rudeness, and both Ruth and Charity were fearful of provoking him to a fresh display of it. It was not very pleasant for any of them. As he was leaving the room he said, with an

attempt at careless ease, "I may not see you again, Ruth, for two or three days. Business calls me away, and I shall leave the city in about an hour. I have told my man to put up such things as I shall need and to meet me at the train. I think I will take a look at the baby before I go." He lingered a moment in the hall, then went slowly up the stairs.

For a moment Ruth had a struggle with herself. Should she let him go in this cold way? She half inclined to do it. He knew that he had not treated her well, and was ashamed of it. It might be foolish to pass such conduct over too easily. If she showed a proper resentment, it might be a good lesson to him.

It was only for a moment. The impetuous woman had a loving nature; she could be easily provoked, but she could not hold out in her anger. A cold, dignified reserve was not at all in her line. Mr. Ashton was her husband, and in the past had been won-

derfully devoted to her; she knew that he was longing for a loving word or glance from her before he went away. That touch about the baby softened her still more. She darted from the room and almost flew up the stairs.

Mr. Ashton was looking down upon the baby in her little bed; the nurse was stirring about in an adjoining room. Lilian slept; there was a rosy flush upon her plump cheeks and a half smile parted her ruby lips. Two little hands just peeped out from the folds of her embroidered blanket. She was so innocent, so lovely, in her sweet unconscious grace that her father's heart was drawn toward her. He bent down and touched the rosy cheek with his lips. At the touch an unwonted tenderness stirred within his soul. The man was at his best.

Ruth saw the loving act and the tender glance. It was enough. She went to him, threw her arms about his neck and kissed

him. He returned her kiss with unwonted emotion. "Good-bye, my dear little wife," he said. "I am not worthy of you."

It was quite a tender parting; in that moment of grace they both seemed to have been carried back to those first days of married life when there had never been any discordant memories to mar their happiness.

Ruth was always glad afterward that it had been so; for that was the last time she ever looked upon her husband's living face. There was an accident on the train that day. Many of the passengers were injured. Only three of them were killed, but one of the three was Mr. Ashton.

CHAPTER XII.

RUTH MOURNS FOR HER HUSBAND.

IN spite of his faults, there was sincere mourning for this man of the world. Even Charity forgot them all in the horror of that sudden death, and Ruth wept and refused to be comforted. She missed her husband's care; she missed the sense of his protection. She felt strangely alone and desolate. Her disposition had always been to cling, to seek support rather than to be self-sustaining. Every day she was forced to decide, plan and arrange matters of which she was entirely ignorant. In her distress she sent for Joseph and begged him to see to things for her. She knew nothing of her husband's property, she knew nothing of investments or securities. Would Joseph arrange all that, tell her

just what she could afford to spend and advise her what to do?

Joseph would, and did. He felt very sorry for his sister; he did not like to see her so pale and weak. Of course it was now decided that Charity would not leave her. Ruth really could not get on without her.

In the first romantic ardor of his love Mr. Ashton had made a will leaving all his property to Ruth. He had since then met with heavy losses, but there was still enough to provide for all her wants and to make the little Lilian something of an heiress.

"You can keep this house and live here in very nice style," said Joseph, "but I do not advise it."

"Nothing would hire me to attempt it," said Ruth, with a little nervous shiver. "The associations would kill me."

"That is well," said Joseph. "One can never tell what shape a woman's fancies

will take, and I was half afraid to urge you to leave your home. It costs a great deal to keep up an establishment like this, and it also involves more care than you are just now equal to."

"It tires me even to think of it," said Ruth.

"You will not care to go much into gay society—at least, not for some time to come," continued Joseph.

"I shall never care for it again. I wonder now that I ever cared for it at all," said Ruth, in her quick, impulsive way.

Joseph smiled. He did not know of the change in Ruth's principles, and, judging her according to the old standards, he thought he might very soon hear of her in the gay world, admiring and admired. "When Lilian is older, you may feel differently," he said. "While she is so young it might be as well for you to husband your resources, invest your money well and let it increase."

"It is just what I would like to do," was the prompt reply.

"We may consider that matter as settled, then," said Joseph. "Now as to your future home. Have you any wish in regard to it? Have you given the subject any thought?"

"I have," said Ruth, "but I do not know as I can carry out my wish. I am afraid Charity might not like it, and I wish to consider her interests as well as my own."

Charity turned quickly from the window where she had pretended to be looking out in order to conceal her restlessness while this discussion was in progress. "Do not change any of your plans on my account," she said; "anything that suits you will suit me. When I make up my mind to any undertaking, I make myself like it."

"But I intend to arrange my home to suit you so well that you will not have to *make* yourself like it," said Ruth, gently. "I am almost ashamed to mention my plan for fear you and Joseph may think it un-

wise or romantic, but I have been thinking of the old home at Ashford, and I should like to buy it, to have it once more in the family."

Charity started. Such a sudden joy shone out from her expressive face that Ruth was astonished at it. But she did not speak a word.

"It does seem a wild scheme," said Joseph, "for a brilliant woman like you to wish to bury yourself in the country, and that you should propose it, Ruth, is indeed a surprise to me—you who used so to hate Ashford when we had such a happy home there, and who used so to long to get away, to get out into the world."

Ruth smiled, but it was a sad smile. "Ah, Joseph," she said, "I have changed in many things since those days. I was then very fond of letting down the bars; now I would be glad to put some of them up again. I have had enough of the gay world; I long for a quiet home where I can

bring up my child in a glad, free, wholesome life such as we then enjoyed."

Joseph sighed. "How happy we were!" he said. "I am what the world calls a successful man, yet I would give half my wealth if I could once more feel as I did then."

"We can never go back to the old feeling," said Ruth. "All is so changed! Those who made the home so precious have gone. Yet I would like to see the old place—to call it mine. My heart clings to it. With a small outlay of money it might be made very comfortable."

"You are right," said Joseph, resuming the thoughtful business-look which had become a habit with him; "and, considered as an investment, it would be no bad thing for you. Ashford is getting to be quite a stirring place; this new railroad has made a great change there. Property is looking up; they are building a new church. And, by the way, I heard the other day that the

people have given Sam a call to fill the pulpit. Of course he would never think of going there."

"Why not?" said Ruth, with more animation than she had shown since her husband's death. "Sam is just pining for a home, and it would be perfectly delightful to have him with us."

"He would never be so foolish as to give up his large salary and his fine congregation to go to Ashford," said Joseph.

"Sam does not care much for money or for fashion," said Charity. "All that he seeks is to do good and to save souls, and there is work enough to be done in Ashford. The town is filling up with people who need looking after. They are in want of just such a faithful, hardworking minister as Sam, and because it is not so desirable in point of salary it will not be so easy for them to get one. You mark my words: if Sam has really received a call there, he will go."

In the clear, decisive ring of Charity's voice there was a note of triumph and of joy.

Joseph noticed it even in his abstracted, thoughtful mood. "Why, Charity," he said, "I do believe you yourself are glad to go back."

"'Glad'!" said Charity. "I never expected to be so happy again."

Then, as if to avoid further questioning, she suddenly left the room.

"What a strange girl Charity is!" said Joseph. "She has received so much attention, and has seemed to enjoy all these parties so much; yet she is as glad to get away from it all as if she had hated it."

"She is a dear, helpful sister, and I could not live without her," said Ruth. "Still, I never could understand her. I should have said that she would oppose me in this wish of mine; I was afraid it would be selfish to propose it to her; but I never before saw such a look of joy upon her face."

"To go back to Sam," said Joseph: "I do not know but she may be right about him. He is not happy where he is. That affair with Carrie Flanders is a bad thing. Sam is one of the set kind; he will never fancy any other girl, and Mr. Flanders will never consent. I cannot blame him, either. Carrie is not the kind of girl to be thrown away upon a poor man, and Sam is so consecrated to the idea of doing good that he never would lay up a cent if he had thrice his income."

"I shall be more happy than ever in carrying out my plan if Sam can see it to be his duty to go to Ashford," said Ruth. "My own mind is made up: the old home shall be mine."

"I will enter into negotiations for it at once," said Joseph as he took up his hat to go; "so you and Charity can consult each other as to what you will do in the line of furnishing and necessary repairs."

CHAPTER XIII.

SAMUEL HOSMER'S FIRST SUNDAY IN THE NEW CHURCH.

THE new church at Ashford had been built, and the new minister was to preach in it for the first time. The new bell gave a harmonious call to saints and sinners to assemble there to worship the one true God. The sun poured out his brightest rays over the hills on that pleasant Sabbath morning, and the echoes of that rich, clear call lingered lovingly on the air.

From hut and cottage and farmhouse the people came out. Impelled by different motives, they drew near, and ere the bell had ceased to toll the church was crowded. Some came in the pride of their hearts to look upon the church

which their money had helped to build; some, because people would think it strange if they should stay away; some, because there was to be a new minister whom they wished to criticise; some, because the music would be sure to be good that day; some, because in some vague way they hoped to be made better by going; some, because of some secret care or trouble in which they craved help; some, because they longed to praise God for help which had been given; some, because they hoped by faith to see the King in his beauty and to receive from him once more a message of salvation, of pardon, of peace.

God alone could read the secret motives of the heart; but there were the people, an eager crowd, with grave, attentive faces, filling the galleries, the pews, even the seats in the aisles. There they were, watching to see all that could be seen, ready to hear every word that should be spoken.

Upon the sea of solemn upturned faces

Samuel Hosmer looked down as he stood up in the pulpit to begin the services. Never before had he felt such a deep sense of his responsibility as a Christian minister; never had he felt so humble as to his own fitness for the work; and his whole soul was crying out to God for help as with a trembling voice he began.

Old things had passed away, all things had become new; yet he stood in his father's place and was preaching to some of his father's people. On this very hilltop he had received the training which had prepared him for the kingdom; on this very hilltop he had consecrated himself to God; now to this hilltop he was called to break to others the bread of life. Oh, if it might be given to him even here to gather in a rich harvest of souls for the Master! He had known some joys and some triumphs in his life, but this would surpass them all. He had endured disappointments and sorrows, but in the bright-

ness of this hope they had passed behind him and out of sight.

The magnetic thrill of this feeling was in his voice as he gave out his text, and the electric current was felt throughout the congregation. People wondered what it was that so moved them. It was a familiar text; most of them had always known it; yet to many it seemed as if they were hearing it for the first time. The sermon was simple, forcible and clear. Any child might understand it; yet the wisest person there might have found in it food for grave reflection.

Ruth Ashton had consented to become once more a singer in the choir. She had just established herself in the home of her childhood, and had as yet received no visitors; but when her brother had urged her to do this for him, she could not refuse. She was very proud of this young brother; she also loved him and felt a strong desire to help him. She knew that any preacher

is sustained and encouraged by having good singing in his church. She did not doubt her own power, for her voice was as clear and as flexible as ever, while it had gained in fullness and richness of tone. This glorious voice was the gift of God. To him she dedicated it anew as she seated herself near the organ and drew the curtains around her, so that no one could see her form or her face.

Oh what memories thronged in upon her as she sat behind those closed curtains and communed with her own heart! Her father and mother and little Faith gone to dwell in that heaven which she now so desired to gain; her husband so suddenly snatched out of life; her own little brother called to be her minister! How strange it all seemed! how like a dream! What wonder was it that her voice faltered and trembled and could with difficulty sustain itself through the first hymn?

But the sermon was preached; the thrill

which all felt went to the heart of the singer. Memories of the past were swept away; consciousness of self receded: there stood before the mourner's soul one glorious Vision. She looked up into the face of her Saviour. Echoing through all the past, the present, the future, she heard the loving call, "Come unto me." Quickly and joyfully the response went back: "O Lord, I come, I come!" And as soon as the chord on the organ sounded, the rich, clear voice came out in its full power with the burden of its song:

"Nearer, my God, to thee."

Never before had Ruth sung as she sang that day; never had any audience been so moved by her singing as was that country congregation. The young people joined in through the very force of sympathy; the older ones listened as if spellbound. Many wiped away the tears which they could not repress. Charity covered her face and

bowed her head. There was another in the congregation who took the same attitude: it was Dr. Ellis.

An old man in one of the back-pews broke down entirely; his sobs were audible. When the congregation was dismissed this old man lingered till almost every one had left the church. Then he went slowly out with trembling steps.

Another old man stood in the porch and greeted him as he drew near. "Well, Bill Grimes," he said, "what has brought you out to church to-day? You are about the last man I expected to see."

"Do not speak to me," said Bill. "It has been a meltin' time. I can hardly ketch my breath yet, it has gin me sech a turn."

"You may well say that," said the first speaker. "Somehow, I never did hear preachin' that took right hold o' me as that did; yet there weren't any sech great learnin' in it, neither."

"It has set me to thinkin' as I never thought before," said Bill. "And I did feel such a drawin' as I kind of hoped that, arter all, I might be one of the elect."

The other shook his head with a grim smile. "I guess the elect is made of different stuff from you and me, Bill," he said. "They don't go in for Sabbath-breakin', swearin' and drinkin', or any sech."

"I know it," said Bill, with a dejected air. "But then my brother Abel did some of them things in his day, as well as the rest of us, and there come a time when he turned right about an' went in strong for goodness. And Parson Hosmer preached it all out as how he was one of the elect. It was a great comfort to Abel; he said it was the right doctrine, and sort of clinched the whole business and made it a sure thing that he would hold out to the end. I kind of wanted to try it myself, and I asked him how it all began. He was very free to tell,

Abel was. He said he was at a preachin' service, and somethin' took right hold of him, and melted him right down, and drew him into the kingdom."

"I heard him tell on it myself, Bill," was the reply, "and I went to some experience-meetin's, thinkin' it might turn out the same way with me; but it weren't of no use."

"That was just what I did," said Bill, "and I got discouraged and give it up. But to-day, when I heard the bells a-ringin' out so cheerful, and I seen the folks all goin' up to this new meetin'-house, and the sun a-shinin' out so bright, I felt sech a drawin' to jine in with the rest that I couldn't stay to home nohow. I took a back seat, for I thought I might want to slip out afore it all ended. But, come to hear little Sammy Hosmer preach—him as I knew when he was a baby—and to hear Ruth a-singin' equal to the saints in glory, and to think of Parson Hosmer and Abel

a-bein' in glory, somethin' took right hold of me good and strong, and it broke me down, and no mistake; and I could not help a-thinkin' that this might be what Abel told about, and that it had been all a mistake about me from first to last, for I had been one of the elect all along, and might have taken the comfort of it as well as not if I had only known it."

As the garrulous old man finished speaking he was surprised to see a sudden change in the face of his companion. He turned quickly around to see what had caused this change, and found himself very near to the young minister, who had been detained a few moments by one of the leading members of the church. Very dignified and calm he looked in his faultless black coat and white cravat. He seemed like a being from another sphere to Bill Grimes in his old worn clothes and with his quaking limbs, aged as much by an ill-spent life as by the flight of time.

Bill shrank back at his approach, but the young man quickened his steps and grasped him warmly by the hand. "Mr. Grimes," he said—"Bill—I was so glad to see you in the church to-day. So many of the old friends have gone that I doubly prize the few who are left."

There was the same earnest friendliness in the brown eyes as when he had given the little boy a ride upon his sled. That and the hearty greeting so wrought upon Bill that he quite forgot his manners as he exclaimed, "Did you think of *me* in the pulpit, Sammy, when you stood up to preach before the whole on 'em? Well, I want to know!"

"I did," said the minister, gravely, "and I prayed that God would put it into my mind to say some word that would do you good. For when I am called to go to the church up above, Bill, I hope to see you there."

At this the old man was so overcome

that his voice was broken by sobs as he said, "With Parson Hosmer and Abel and all the rest? Oh, Sammy, Sammy, do you think there is a chance of it? I have been so bad all my life! and now my strength has clean gin out. It don't appear as if the Lord could care now whether I set out for goodness or not."

"He does care," said the minister. "It is a wonder how he can care for any of us, but he does. He has said so in his word, and what we find there is the very truth."

"If I could only make sure that I was one of the elect!" said Bill.

"Let that go," was the reply. "Jesus Christ came to save sinners: you are sure that you are a sinner, are you not?"

"Certain," said Bill—"one of the worst kind."

"Then Christ died to save you. You have but to accept him as your Saviour, to turn to him and to live for him from

this time forth, and your salvation is sure. He said himself that he came to save that which was lost."

"I can seem to see that 'ere point," said Bill; "Dr. Ellis puts it somehow so, and it sounds very comfortin'; but I never dared to take hold on it for fear it might be the wrong kind of doctrine. Your father was strong on doctrine, Sammy, and so was Abel. They would never give in to a wrong doctrine, let a man be saved or lost."

The young minister could not help smiling. Well he remembered the long discussions on doctrine which had stirred his father's very soul and called forth all his reasoning powers. "You need not be afraid, Bill," he said. "This doctrine was preached by Christ himself, and my father believed in it as firmly as I do."

"I believe you, Sammy," said the old man. "You never told a lie in your life, that I ever heard tell on. I mean to take

the Lord at his word now and hold on till I die, for I have felt such a drawin' toward the kingdom this day that it seems as though I cannot stay away whether I be elect or not."

Samuel glanced around him and saw that every one had left the church but himself and this aged sinner; so, in answer to this decision, he made a short, earnest prayer, in which he commended this seeking soul to the mercy of a merciful God. Then, with another friendly grasp of the hand, the two parted, both much strengthened and comforted.

Samuel was greatly encouraged that the Lord had given him this sign of acceptance and favor in the conversion of one whom he had always liked; Bill Grimes rejoiced in a new hope and a new purpose.

That evening the three children who had come back to the old home were together in the family sitting-room. This room—as all the rest of the house, indeed—had

been well furnished and made not only comfortable but tasteful in all its arrangements. The fireplace, however, had been retained exactly as in the olden time. The old-fashioned clock ticked loudly in the corner, and the stand with the Bible upon it was placed near one of the windows. It was the very same book from which Mr. Hosmer had read to his family at morning and evening prayers. Great care had been taken to retain these sacred relics of the past.

It was a happy family who were enjoying the warmth and cheerful blaze of the open fire after that first Sunday's services had ended, yet they were very quiet. Each one rejoiced in the restful home-feeling, yet each had experiences of sorrow to remember, and food for anxious thought.

Ruth had her baby upon her lap as she sat in the low rocking-chair, and responded with a smile or a caress to its playful attempts to attract her attention. Samuel lay

back in a large cushioned arm-chair with his eyes fixed upon the glowing coals.

Charity sat in a similar chair opposite with her face shaded by her hand. She was the first to break the silence. "How strange it seems," she said, "that we three should be here without the others! I find myself constantly listening for the sound of their footsteps in the hall and watching for the familiar forms to come in at the open door."

"So do I," said Ruth. "I cannot bear to think that the rest are so widely scattered, and not only scattered, but changed—so changed that I fear we shall never again be one in heart either in time or in eternity."

"The change in Patience and Matthew is greatly for the better," said Charity.

"Yes," said Ruth; "but, good as Joseph is and kind as he has been to me, I fear that the money-getting spirit holds full possession of him. Amos is a wreck; David cares

little for the future life; Esther is spoiled by prosperity—"

"And Paul?" broke in Charity, wringing her hands in a sort of despairing impatience. "Oh, where *is* Paul? If I only knew, I would travel over half the world to find him and bring him back."

Samuel heard these remarks in silence.

Charity turned to him as she concluded, and the peaceful expression of his face seemed to irritate her. "Samuel," she said, "why do you not speak? Are you so intent on the thoughts of your work for others that you do not care for your own brothers and sisters?"

"It is because I care so much that I do *not* speak," said Samuel. "It can do no good to talk; I would rather pray."

"It does seem so strange that any of my father's children can ever forget his prayers and his teachings," said Ruth.

"They never can," said Samuel. "They may not profit by them, but they can never

forget; and I am firm in the faith that, after all their wanderings through the desert, the time will come when every one of my father's children will enter the promised land."

THE END.

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